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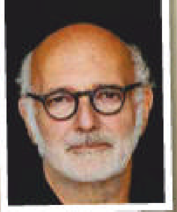
We meet the best-selling composer-pianist



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How the volcanic nation is enjoying a cultural boom

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BBC RADIO 3
Full February listings inside
See p100

JASCHA HEIFETZ

What made the violinist the greatest virtuoso of his generation?

John Luther Adams
The composer who headed into the wilds

Acis and Galatea
The best recordings of Handel's oratorio

Stephen Sondheim
A remarkable life celebrated in pictures

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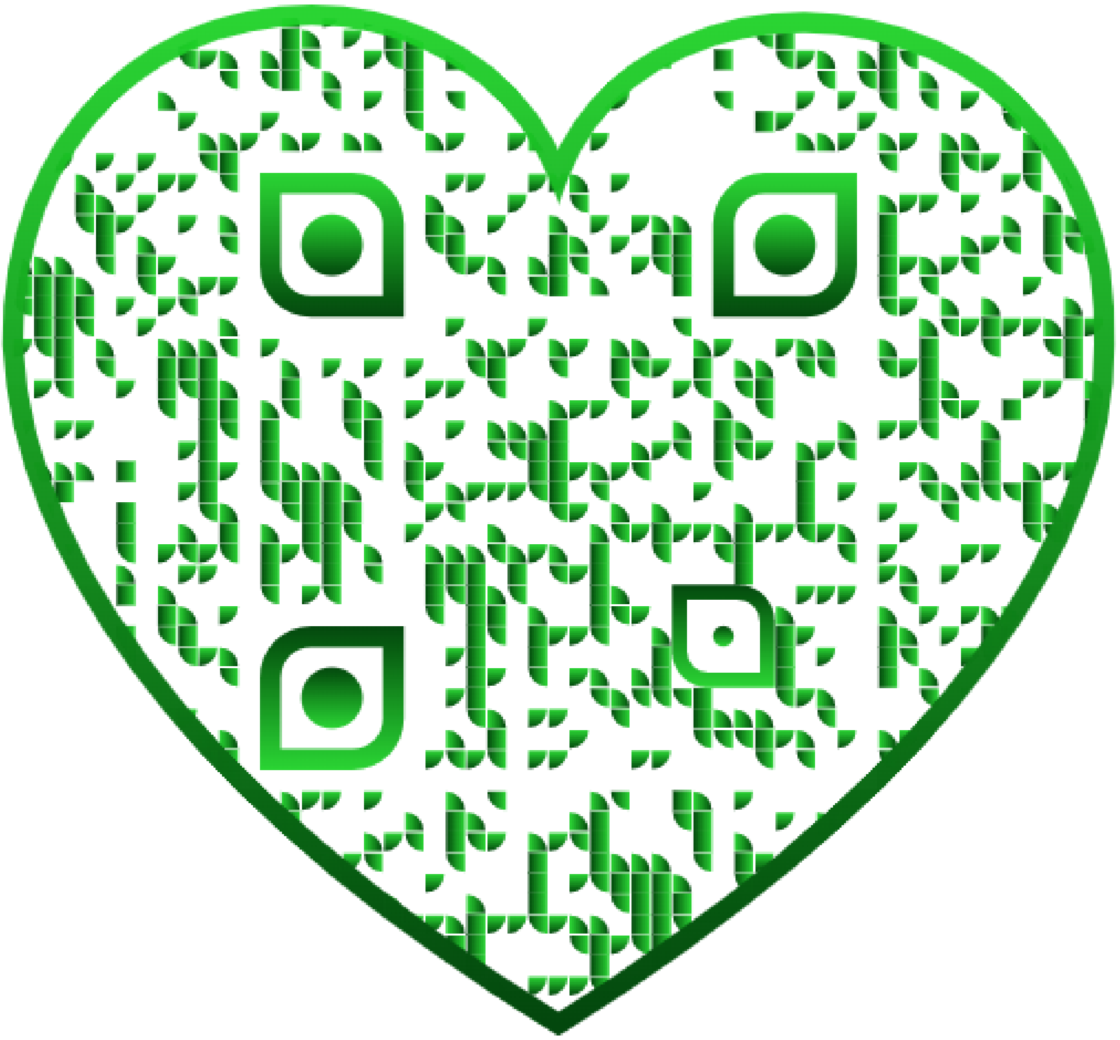
AWARDS2022
Cast your vote now! Choose the greatest albums of the year *see p26*



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Welcome

As we were putting together our cover feature on Jascha Heifetz, I got in touch with three of today's leading violinists to find out what they make of their famous forebear. The responses were fascinating. 'Was he was my favourite violinist?' replies one. 'Unlikely. But he was a huge influence on just about all of us.' 'I doubt that any of us have escaped his influence,' agrees another. 'While he isn't my "favourite", you can't take your ears off him when he's playing.' The third, meanwhile, admits that 'when people asked us what we wanted to be when we grew up, I'd say I wanted to play the violin better than Heifetz!'... before implying that her tastes have now changed a little. As Jack Liebeck (not one of the three) points out on p31, Heifetz's style is distinctively, uniquely and inimitably his. Whether or not you enjoy his recordings is a matter of taste – I am largely a big fan – but they are rarely dull. What do you think?

Given my own track record of subjecting a succession of violin teachers to a sound that resembles the proverbial nails being dragged down a blackboard, this seems an apposite issue in which to pass the *BBC Music Magazine* bow on to someone who, in contrast, plays the instrument rather well. From next month, we welcome our new editor Charlotte Smith, who joins us from *The Strad*. Many thanks for your company over the last few months!

Jeremy Pound *Acting Editor*

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

Julian Haylock
Writer and journalist
'It's over a century since Jascha Heifetz made his sensational American debut, yet his finest recordings still dazzle and amaze. Little wonder that for many he remains the "violinist of the 20th century".' ***Page 28***

Stephen Pritchard
Music journalist, The Guardian
'Iceland's primordial landscape of volcanic deserts, black sand beaches, spectacular waterfalls and gushing geysers can only support a tiny population – but it's one that cares deeply about music.' ***Page 46***

Rebecca Franks
Music journalist, The Times
'My first encounter with John Luther Adams's music was the recording of *Become Ocean*, the piece which won him the Pulitzer Prize. Instantly hooked, I eagerly began exploring the rest of his remarkable works.' ***Page 60***

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Subscriptions £64.87 (UK); £65 (Europe); £74 (Rest of World) ABC Reg No. 3122

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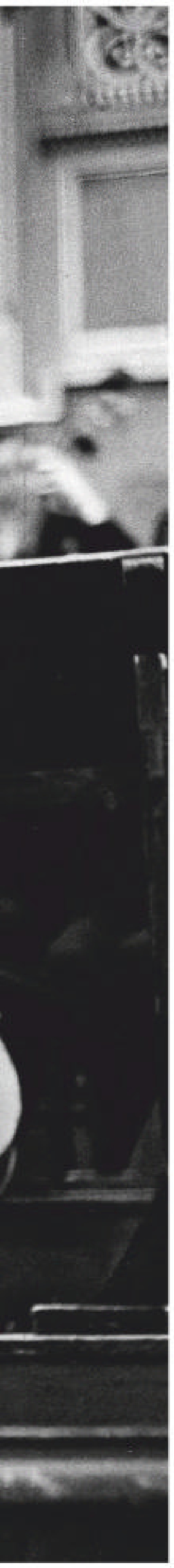

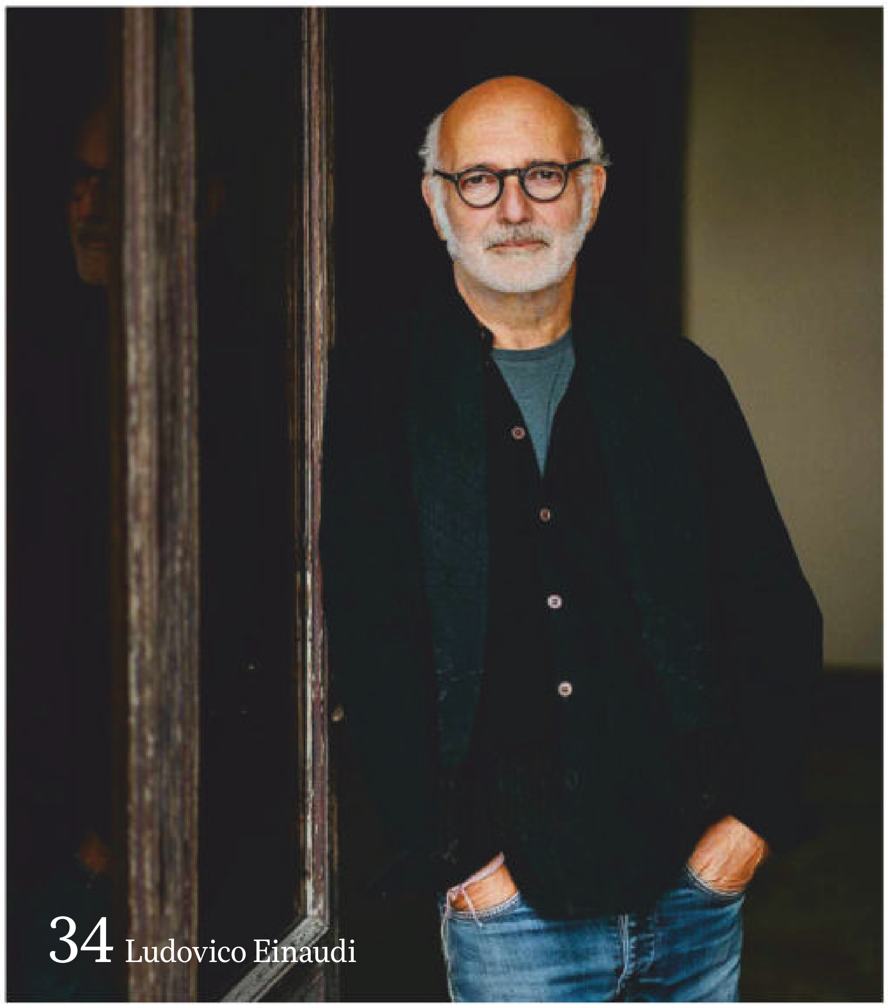

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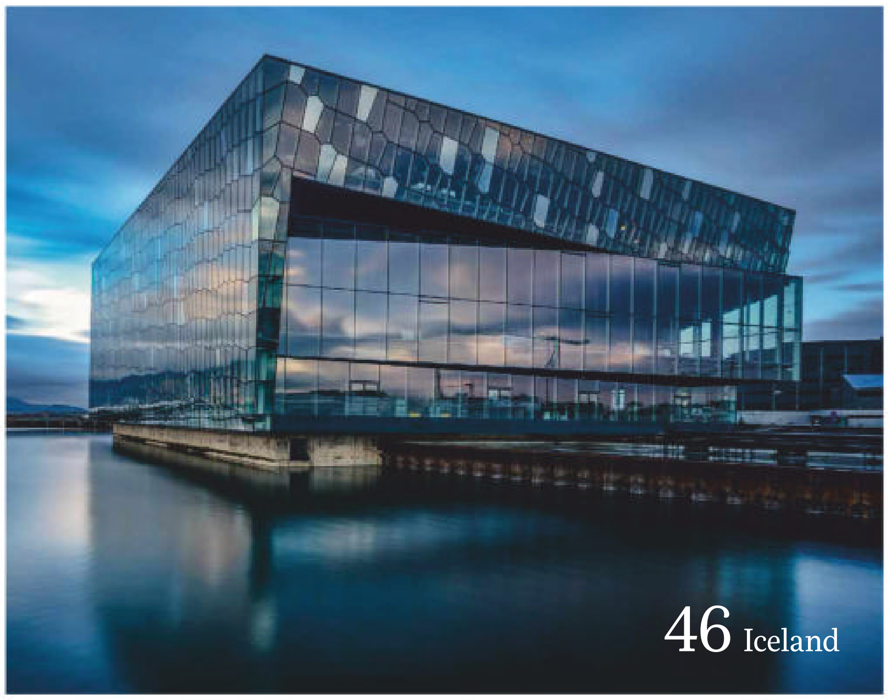

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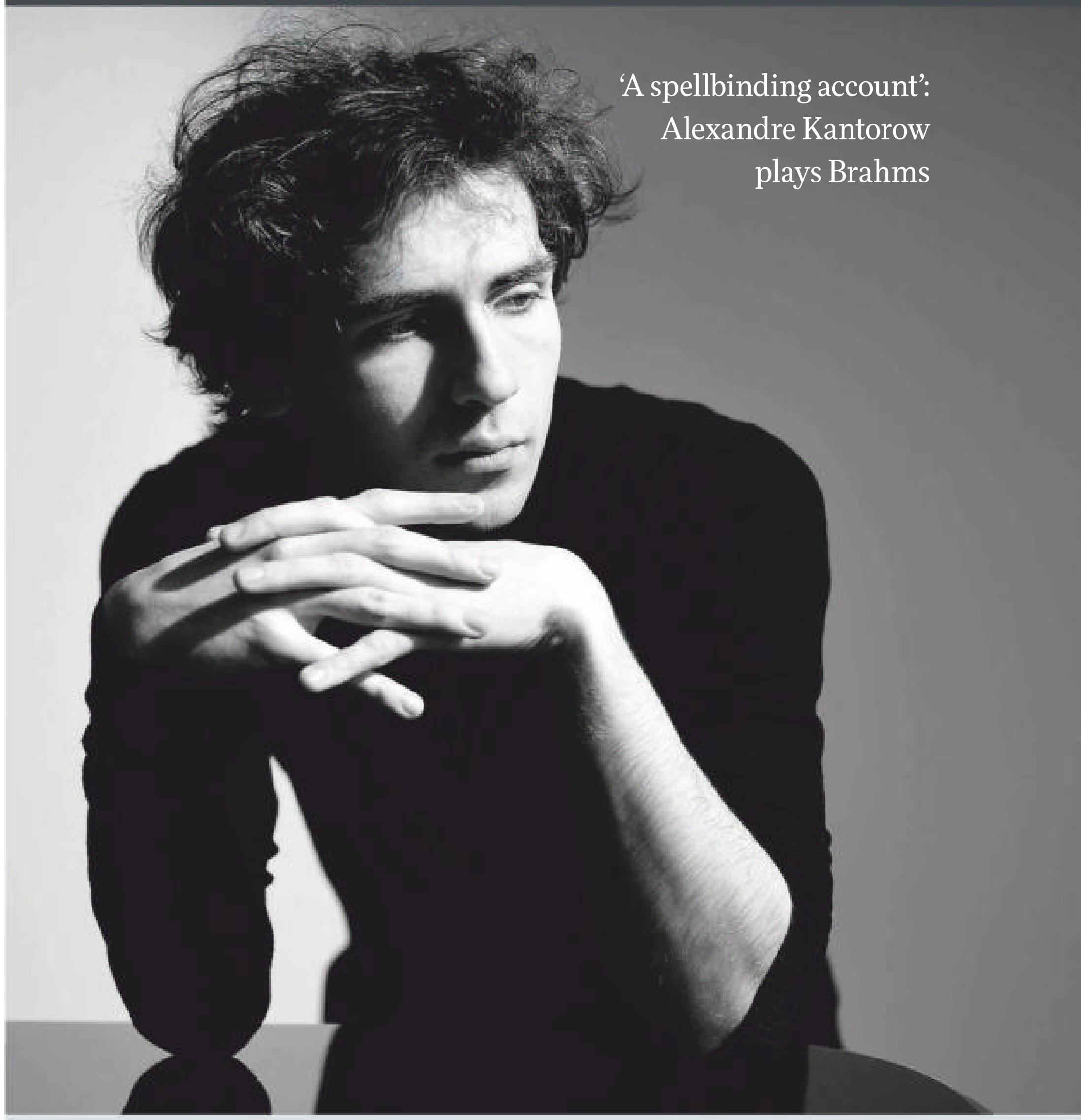
February reviews

Your guide to the best new recordings and books



'A spellbinding account': Alexandre Kantorow plays Brahms

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Brahms
Alexandre Kantorow

'Masterly pacing of the musical argument and a tremendous depth and beauty of tone that Kantorow draws from the piano'

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LETTER of the MONTH

Loosening the collar: Otto Klemperer was a fan of less formal attire

GETTY

Time for a bit of a dressing down

Well done Richard Morrison for suggesting that musicians should ditch the 'penguin suit' (Christmas issue). In my experience, no string quartet or other chamber ensemble nowadays ever wears such garb here in the UK. It is now those orchestras whose men continue to dress like flunkies at a late-19th-century Viennese function who stand out like sore thumbs – an off-puttingly anachronistic sight for young people new to concertgoing. You are unlikely to see either Chineke! or the Manchester Collective in that sort of getup. However, I have in front of me the programme for Otto Klemperer's penultimate London concert in the Royal Festival Hall with the New Philharmonia on Sunday 16 May 1971, in which it is noted that 'At Dr Klemperer's request, the orchestra and chorus are wearing informal dress for this evening's concert'. As I recall, the men wore comfortable lounge suits – wisely, as the revered Dr K brought Mahler's Second in at nearly 1hr 40 mins! If he could, Dr K would applaud Richard Morrison's sentiments, 50 years later…
***Michael Browne,** Beeston*

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Piano gems

I enjoyed Malcolm Hayes's article exploring beyond Tchaikovsky's greatest hits (*Composer of the Month*, Christmas) but found it ironic that even he wholly ignored his nearly nine hours of piano music! If I had to pick a favourite? The lullaby Tchaikovsky wrote shortly before his death (Op. 72 No. 2 Berceuse) – with its repetitive minimal riff and lovely melody it sounds like a precursor to Satie, or Ravel's *Boléro*. Michael Ponti's recording is the best.
***David Davis,** London*

Missing Maazel

Your *Timepiece* article in the Christmas issue recounting the origins and story of the famous New Year's Day Concert in Vienna ignored the contribution and achievements of Lorin Maazel. It is indeed true that Clemens Krauss conducted the first concert and continued to appear on a further 12 occasions. It is also true that the prolific conductor Willi Boskovsky appeared on no fewer than 25 occasions, just as it is also undeniable that the most memorable of the occasions was conducted by Herbert von Karajan who, on 1 January 1987, gave a performance that will remain forever etched in the mind as a perfect example of interpretation of the highest order. But where was the reference to the man who conducted on no fewer than 11 occasions and whose contribution was vastly superior to the interminably dull contributions of some of the other maestros who have tried their hand at this wonderful repertoire? Maazel was, of course, a controversial figure. He had personality and definite ideas on interpretation, and to some music lovers he is one of the few conductors whose name one can mention alongside the illustrious greats such as Toscanini, Karajan, Walter, Klemperer and all. Despite his extraordinary career and legacy of recordings, he is frequently overlooked by music writers and critics in this country.
***Daniel Chapchal,** Fetcham*

Memorable moment

Your December issue feature *It'll end in tears*… brought back recurring memories of a musical moment that was easily my most memorable. It was a few decades ago at a friend's 50th birthday, at a party he treated himself to at a recreation space in his living complex with about 50 invited guests. George hired a folk trio, who had made a few CDs and sang at clubs and minor events – two female singers, Katy Taylor and Amy Fradon, and an accompanying instrumentalist – for

entertainment. One of the pieces they performed was a duet with no accompaniment of a piece attributed to Hildegard von Bingen, *Alleluia! O Virga Mediatrix*. The harmony, the acoustics, the music and the performance were ethereal – so magically stunning that at the end of the piece not one of the guests knew how to react. For at least half a minute you could have heard the proverbial pin drop. And then, of course, the applause began and lasted for many minutes. The experience was so involving that I was physically exhausted and took a while to recover myself. If I would live forever, the memory of that moment would become infinite.
Allen Edelstein,
Highland Park, NJ, US

Familiar chimes

Sitting in front of the wood stove with the TV streaming a classical music channel as I was reading through your November *Timepiece* feature about Vierne's *Carillon de Westminster*, I realised that the four-note motif was being played clear as a bell right then on the TV. However, the music was the 1925 work *Rossiniana* by Respighi and there is great similarity in the theme of the first movement with Vierne's music, which was apparently published two years later in 1927. However, *Rossiniana* was based on the earlier 1919 Respighi ballet, *La Boutique fantasque*, which in turn was based on short piano pieces from Rossini's collection *Péchés de vieillesse* (Sins of Old Age) which were written some 50 years or so earlier. The piano piece in particular is 'Un Cauchemar'. Rossini evidently visited London in 1824. Did he catch the theme then, or is it all just coincidence? I just thought I would chime in.
Brian Hill, *Mount Pearl, Canada*

The Acting Editor replies: There is, yes, a close similarity between the opening theme of *Rossiniana* and the third quarter of the Westminster Chimes – though the *Rossiniana* theme drops a perfect fifth at the beginning, whereas the Chimes drops a major third. But I think it's unlikely that Rossini would have picked up on the tune in the way you suggest, as the Westminster Chimes originated in Cambridge and were not introduced to London until 1851, long after Rossini's visit to London (though pre-dating his *Péchés de vieillesse*). Unless, of course, he also visited Cambridge…?

Bruckner successor

I wish that the 'Continue the journey…' in your *Building A Library* feature on Bruckner's Fifth Symphony (November), had included the symphonies of Austrian composer Marcel Tyberg (1893-1944). His music sounds somewhat like Brahms, somewhat like Bruckner, somewhat like Mahler. Sadly, few people know of his work. Tyberg died in Auschwitz. Fortunately, just before his arrest, he turned over a number of his manuscripts to an Italian man who had befriended him. In 2005, that man's son, Dr Enrico Mihich, brought the manuscripts to the conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic, JoAnn Falletta. She reviewed them and subsequently recorded two CDs for Naxos: Tyberg's Second and Third Symphonies, along with two chamber works. Anyone who appreciates the Viennese tradition will enjoy Tyberg's music.
George C Leef, *Raleigh, NC, US*

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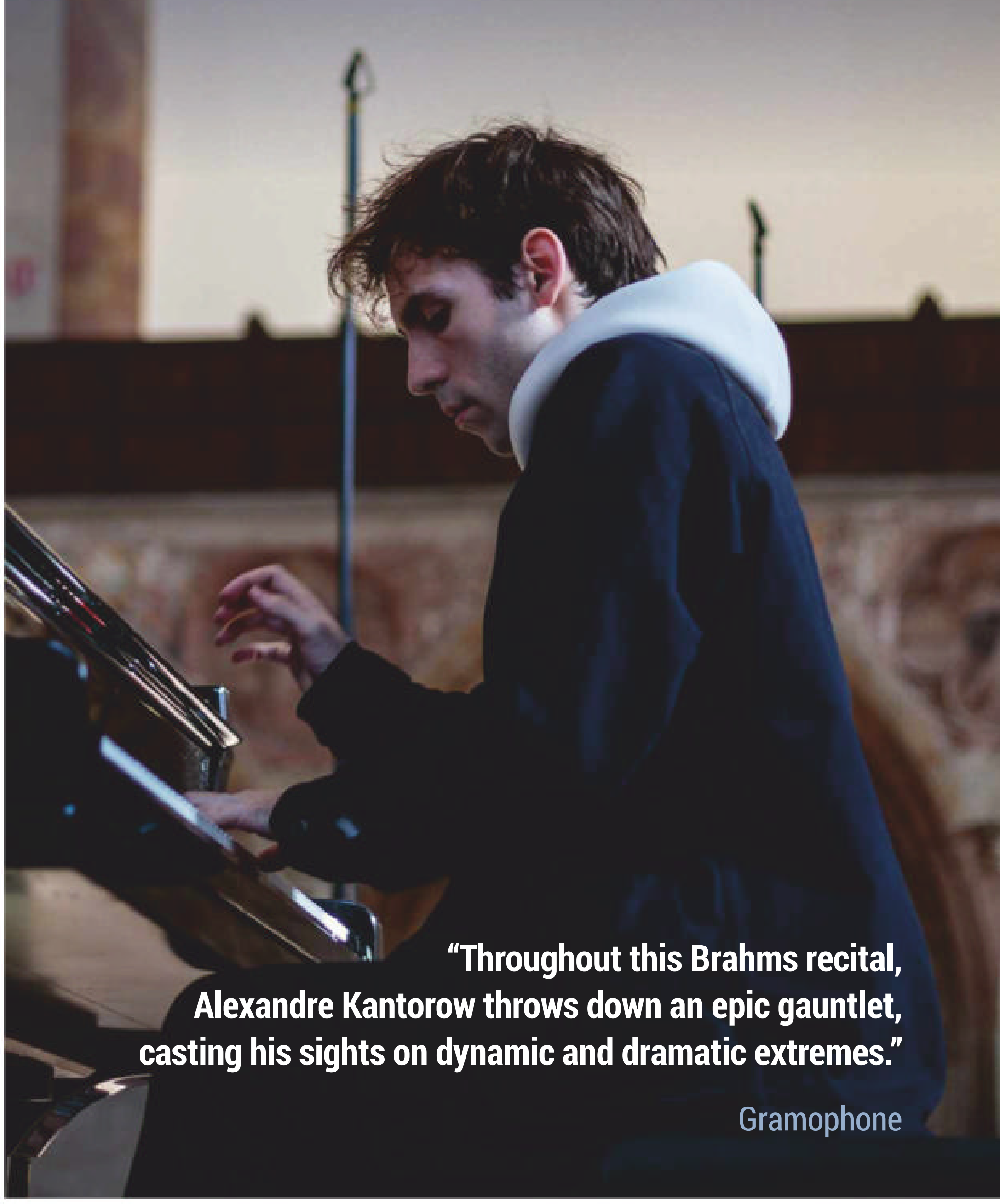

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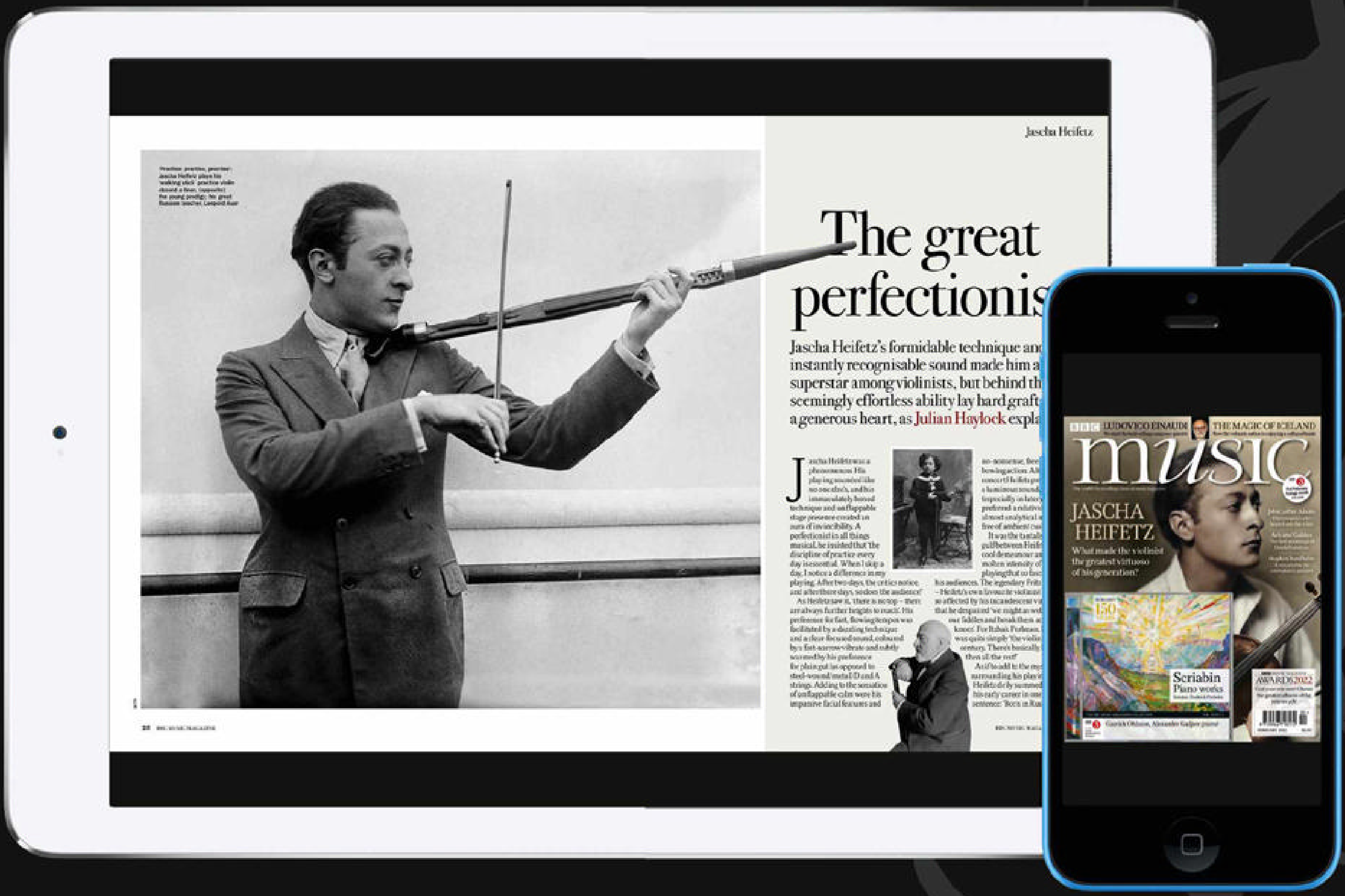

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BBC music MAGAZINE

The *full* score

Our pick of the month's news, views and interviews

Climate change sets the tone at The Ivors Awards

Anna Thorvaldsdottir and Thomas Adès among this year's big-name winners

Ivor good reason to smile: Martin Iddon wins for *Lampades*; (above) Iceland's Anna Thorvaldsdottir

MARK ALLAN

Thomas Adès and Anna Thorvaldsdottir are among the well known winners of this year's Ivors Composer Awards, announced at a ceremony at the British Museum. For the first time in Ivors history, awards were given to works which received their premieres on recordings or livestreams, rather than simply focusing on live performance. This allowed for the inclusion of works that were first performed during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Thomas Adès's vocal composition *Gyöker (Root)* was one such piece. Commissioned by conductor Oliver Zeffman as part of his 'Eight Songs from Isolation' project, it sets texts from the final poems Miklós Radnóti wrote during his imprisonment in a forced labour camp at the end of the Second World War. The jury praised Adès's work as being 'gut-wrenchingly beautiful, deeply poetic and strikingly original'.

Climate change and the threat to the planet was addressed by many of the shortlisted works, with Anna Thorvaldsdottir's *CATAMORPHOSIS* winning the Large-scale Composition Award. Exploring the 'fragile relationship between humankind and the planet,' the Icelandic composer's piece was premiered by the Berlin Philharmonic and its chief conductor Kirill Petrenko earlier this year and streamed to audiences on the Berlin Phil's Digital Concert Hall. Thorvaldsdottir was among six first-time winners in this year's Ivors line-up.

Like Adès, University of Leeds music professor Martin Iddon is no stranger to the Ivors, having been nominated several times previously. This year, he won the Ivor for Solo Composition for *Lampades*, his new piece for tuba and fixed media. The jury praised its 'original soundworld, creating an immersive, mysterious sense of space'.

The Ivors also celebrate new works in the field of jazz and sound art. Saxophonist and improviser Caroline Kraabel's 40-minute film *London 26 and 28 March 2020: Imitation: Inversion* won this year's Sound Art Award. Scored for vocalist, double bass and sopranino saxophone, the piece is set to a film which features shots of London's deserted city centre during the first Covid-19 lockdown. Kraabel captured the footage herself while cycling around the city. The Ivors Academy also celebrated the seven-decade career of Alexander Goehr in its Award for Outstanding Works Collection, while vocalist and composer Cleveland Watkiss received the Innovation Award for his work in improvisation and contemporary British jazz.

Previously known as the British Composer Awards, The Ivors were first awarded in 2003 and, over those 18 years, have honoured many of the UK's best known composers. For a full list of winners both from this and previous years, go to ivorsacademy.com/awards.

Pinot recital: Thomas Fritzsch plays in the key of Gris major

Enjoy a taste of Telemann as winegrowers go for Baroque

Should you find yourself enjoying a German Pinot Gris with distinct notes of gamba in the near future, here's why. The Freyburg Winegrowers' Association recently employed Thomas Fritzsch to play a little Telemann to its barrels as they lay in situ in the cellar (above), and the music will continue to sonicate (agitate particles by means of sound) the wine by means of a loud speaker placed inside another barrel until April. At that point, a blind tasting will be carried out on the batch – around 3,600 bottles' worth – to see whether Baroque soundwaves have a beneficial effect on its taste compared to non-sonicated samples. We feel confident they will. Happy drinking!

THE MONTH IN NUMBERS

4

… recently rediscovered pieces that pay tribute to Admiral Nelson (above) have been performed and recorded at the Museum of London Docklands

50,000,000

… dollars donated to the Juilliard School by the Crankstart foundation to provide tuition to students from under-represented backgrounds

18

… stops to play with, as the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire reveals its new £550,000 baroque-style organ

54

… years and no more, as Midem, the Cannes-based music industry tradefair, announces its closure

TRISTRAM KENTON, ALAMY, GETTY

SoundBites

Youthful appeal: Freddie De Tommaso in *Tosca*

Lend us a tenor

Eyebrows were raised at the Royal Opera House's production of *Tosca* shortly before Christmas when, totally against character, the eponymous heroine appeared to dump her lover Mario Cavaradossi mid-opera and take off with a younger man. Tsk! In fact, it was simply that tenor Bryan Hymel (42) fell ill and Freddie De Tommaso (28) stepped in to play the ill-fated painter, to great acclaim.

Taking Stockholm

Ryan Bancroft has been named as the next chief conductor of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra. The 32-year-old American, who is also the principal conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and recently won the Conductor Award at the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards, begins his new Swedish role at the beginning of the 2022/23 season.

Endangered folk

Finnish Kaustinen folk fiddling, Inuit drum dancing and singing in Greenland, and *Għana*, a type of Maltese folk singing, have all been recently added to Unesco's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. Other additions to the culturally endangered list include Congolese rumba, Indonesian gamelan and Bolivia's Grand Festival of Tarija.

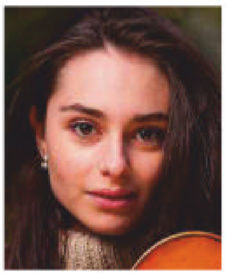
Intimate in Ibiza

Ibiza, the Balearic place of pilgrimage for young people who love dance music, partying and getting to know each other well, is to get a classical music festival. For six days in April, musicians including violinist David Garrett and pianist Denis Matsuev will be rocking up to the Mediterranean island for the first ever instalment of the new Ibiza Clasico event. The festival organisers say they want to foster 'an intimacy that will elevate the experience'.

Rising Stars

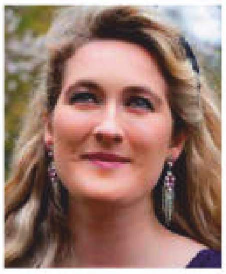
Three to look out for...

Esther Abrami *Violinist*



Born: Marseilles, France
Career highlight: Developing an online community of over 800,000 people with whom I can share my musical journey, as well as signing to Sony with a multi-album deal.
Musical hero: I've always looked up to the violinist Yehudi Menuhin. His humanitarian work and the extremely touching quality of his playing and open-mindedness in approaching different musical styles have been a constant source of inspiration.
Dream concert: Playing a concert under conductor Gustavo Dudamel at the Hollywood Bowl, with a mix of core classical repertoire, new compositions and improvisations.

Hilary Cronin *Soprano*

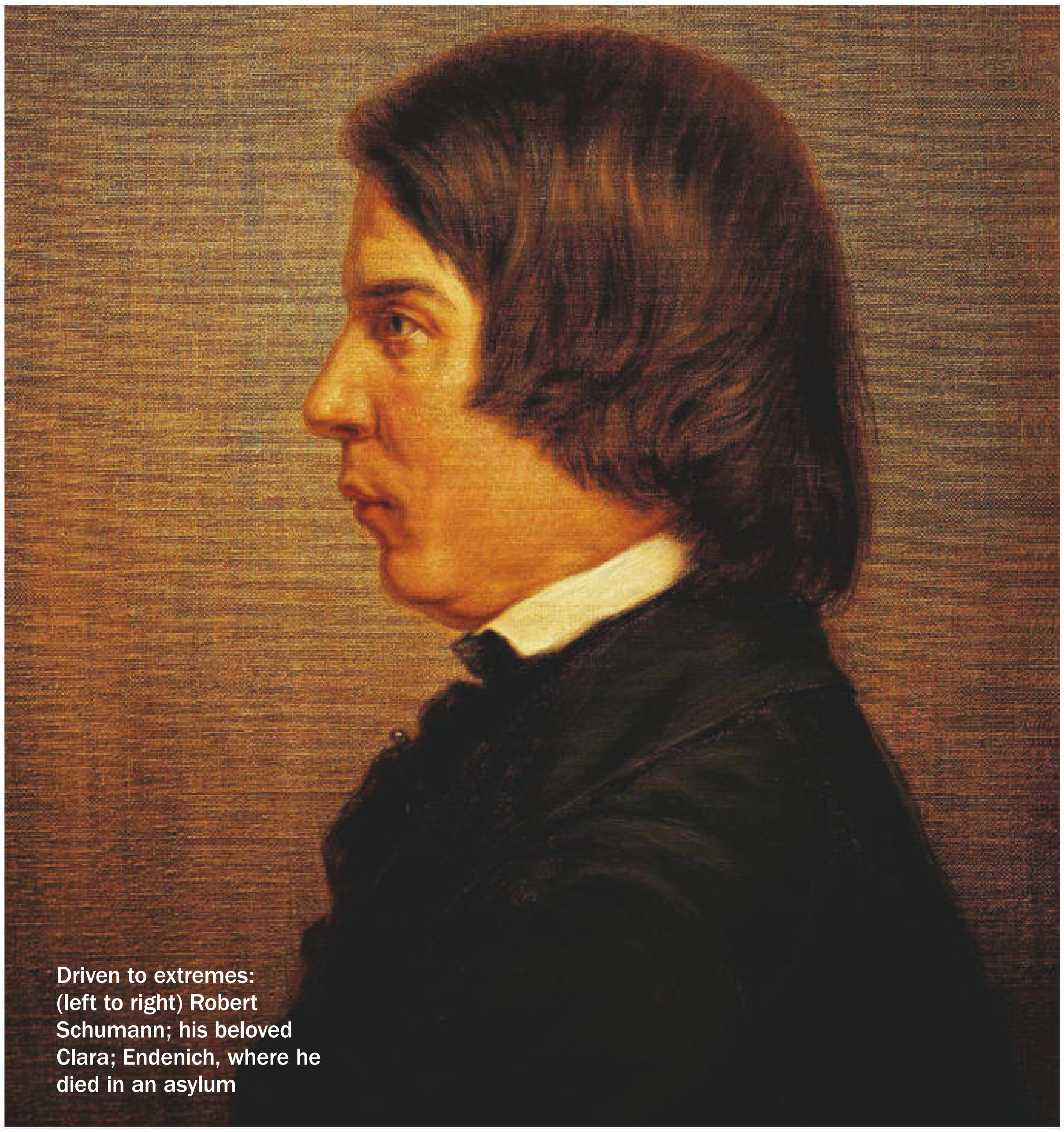


Born: Suffolk, UK
Career highlight: Winning first prize and the audience prize at the 2021 International Handel Singing Competition. It was thrilling to perform with Laurence Cummings and the London Handel Orchestra.
Musical hero: I have always been mesmerised by soprano Renée Fleming. Her voice moves me like no other and I admire everything she's done for young artists.
Dream concert: I would love to perform in a BBC Prom with the John Wilson Orchestra, celebrating the songs from MGM Musicals, as I grew up listening to the music of Rodgers and Hammerstein. And if a 1950s Howard Keel could join us, that would be particularly wonderful!

Kay Salomon *Conductor*

Born: Périgueux, France
Career highlight: Playing Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 in front of the Queen when I was 17. More recently, I became Opera North's conducting trainee, and I can't wait to be immersed in the opera world and learn from inspiring artists.
Musical hero: I always think of Mozart as my 'companion', whose music accompanies me as I go about my day.
Dream concert: To conduct Verdi's *La traviata* in a prestigious opera house. I recently had the opportunity to work on the opera with some of the artists from the Royal Opera House and fell in love with Verdi.

TIMEPIECE This month in history



Driven to extremes: (left to right) Robert Schumann; his beloved Clara; Endenich, where he died in an asylum

GETTY

FEBRUARY 1854

Schumann throws himself into the ice-cold Rhine

The morning of 27 February 1854 (a Monday) began as many did for Robert Schumann. After breakfast, he worked quietly at home in Düsseldorf. Around noon, however, he emerged from his study, and left the family's first-floor apartment on Bilker Strasse without explanation.

Still wearing a floral-patterned dressing gown and slippers, and hatless in cold weather, he walked at least ten minutes through pouring rain to a wooden pontoon bridge on the River Rhine. Schumann may or may not have been recognised en route: it was carnival time in the city, so his bizarre attire would probably have blended more easily into the milling crowds than it might otherwise have done.

Arriving at the bridge, Schumann had no money to pay the toll collector. But he offered his silk handkerchief in lieu and was allowed to continue. The specific details of what happened next are blurred by history. At some point on his way across the bridge, Schumann halted, stepped over the wooden railing and entered the Rhine, possibly via one of the pontoon boats below.

The impact of the ice-cold water was immediate, and Schumann would undoubtedly have drowned or died of hypothermia had help not been at hand immediately. It came from Joseph Jüngermann, a local river worker who reacted swiftly by pulling the composer from the fast-flowing current into his vessel. Schumann apparently resisted, but was eventually brought ashore and taken home in a cart.

While the news of Schumann's apparent suicide attempt was shocking to his friends and family – 'What I felt is indescribable, it was as if my heart had stopped beating', his wife Clara said later – it was not totally surprising. For years, he had suffered from mental instability and, in the weeks immediately preceding the Rhine incident, it had grown alarmingly worse.

He had reported suffering from 'very strong and painful auditory disturbances' and began hearing music 'more wonderful than one ever hears on earth'. One theme, he claimed, was dictated to him by Schubert – dead for quarter of a century – and he began writing variations on it. But demon voices assailed Schumann too, accusing him of sinfulness and causing him to scream out fearfully. More than once he worried that he might unwittingly attack his beloved Clara.

What had caused this horrifying episode of instability? Acres of text have been devoted to analysing Schumann's mental illness – schizophrenia, burn-out, bipolar disorder and syphilis have all been suggested as causes. External factors undoubtedly played a part too. A few months previously, he had been forced to step down as municipal director of music in Düsseldorf, where his tenure had not inspired confidence. The humiliation was substantial and there were also financial consequences, especially as Clara was pregnant with the couple's seventh child. Any or all of these circumstances could have helped trigger Robert's final mental collapse. The truth is we will never know precisely why Schumann acted as he did on that catastrophic February morning in 1854.

Schumann screamed out fearfully as demon voices accused him of sinfulness

Five days later, he was admitted to an asylum 40 miles away in Endenich, near Bonn, a move Schumann himself had suggested to his doctors. There he spent the remaining 28 months of his life, occasionally lucid, but more often delusional and sometimes straitjacketed.

Clara, strongly advised by doctors to stay away from Endenich, visited her husband just once, on 27 July 1856. 'He smiled at me,' she recorded, ' and wrapped his arm around me – never will I forget that.' Two days later, Robert died, aged 46. Despite living on another 40 years, Clara never remarried.

Grand occasion: Martin's *Belshazzar's Feast*

Also in February 1854

16th: In Weimar, **Franz Liszt** conducts the first performance of his symphonic poem *Orpheus*. The work, according to Liszt's preface to the score, is inspired partly by an Etruscan vase in the Louvre that depicts the mythological poet and musician 'clad in a starry robe'. A performance of Gluck's opera *Orfeo ed Euridice* follows the premiere.

17th: The eminent English painter **John Martin** dies aged 64 on the Isle of Man. Best known for his dramatic landscapes and literary and biblical scenes, his most famous work included *Belshazzar's Feast*, winner of the prize for best picture at the British Institution in 1821. His popularity spread across Europe, and the poet Heinrich Heine once referred to his Romantic style in describing the music of Berlioz.

23rd: At the First Raadsaal in Bloemfontein, British special commissioner Sir George Clerk and representatives of the Boer people sign the **Orange River Convention**. This recognises the independence of the area between the Orange and Vaal rivers that will eventually become known as the Orange Free State.

27th: As tension continues to build over the declining Ottoman Empire, Britain sends an ultimatum to Russia demanding that it removes its forces from the Romanian provinces of Moldova and Wallachia following its recent invasion. Though Russia will eventually withdraw from the region, it does not do so within the time set by the ultimatum, and Britain and France subsequently instigate the **Crimean War**.

28th: American attorney Alvan E Bovay and fellow former members of the Whig party gather at the Congregational church in Ripon, Wisconsin, to discuss creating a new political party to oppose the spread of slavery threatened by the proposed Kansas-Nebraska Act. Weeks later, when the Act is passed, they form what will eventually become the **Republican Party**.

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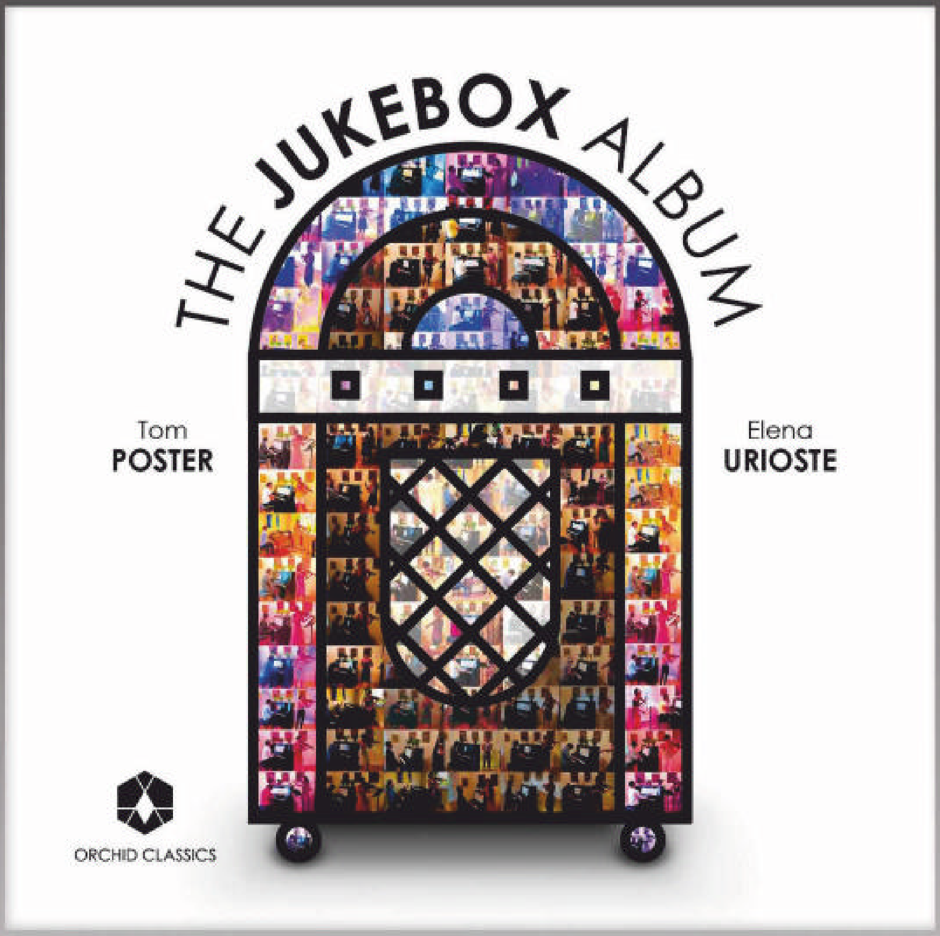


PREMIERE AWARD

ORC100173

The Jukebox Album
Elena Urioste, *violin*
Tom Poster, *piano*

NEWCOMER AWARD

ORC100164

Heart and Hereafter
Elizabeth Llewellyn, *soprano*
Simon Lepper, *piano*

Please visit **www.classical-music.com** or scan below to cast your vote!

Salzburg invites Merkel to take a long-term pew

When, in December, the final curtain came down on Angela Merkel's 16-year spell as Chancellor of Germany, a welcome retirement present was waiting for her from neighbouring Austria – free tickets for life, for both Merkel and her husband Joachim Sauer, to the Salzburg Festival. The gift was made by the Austrian government, which says that it will ensure that the revered ex-politician will have seats reserved at whatever she chooses to attend. This is no empty gesture, as Merkel, a major classical music enthusiast, has been a regular visitor to the city of Mozart's birth for many years. Now, with a little more time on her hands, she may make herself very much at home...

DÉJÀ VU

History just keeps on repeating itself...

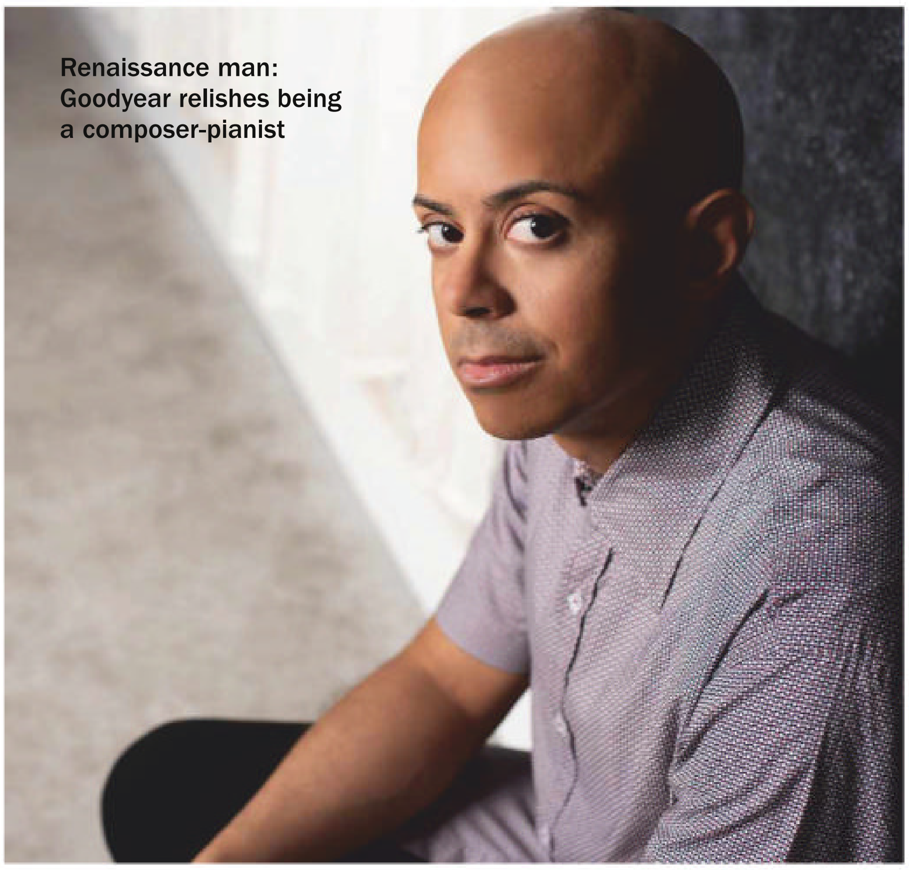
In South Africa, the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra and Cape Town Opera have released a new album called *Cwaka. The Silence* (left) to highlight the many difficulties that the pandemic has brought upon music ensembles. The album does exactly what is says on the tin – it consists of nine completely silent recordings of works by composers ranging from Bizet to Gershwin. It is not the first time that musicians have made a point of staying silent...

In his 'Rider' Op. 74 No. 3 String Quartet (1793), **Haydn** requires his players, almost as soon as they have started, to stop for a full three bars. Play then resumes at full pelt, as if the break had never happened. **Berlioz** and **Janáček** also employ a bar of complete silence to dramatic effect, in the 'Rex tremendae' of *Grande Messe des morts* (1837) and the death of the heroine in *The Cunning Little Vixen* (1924) respectively. **Mahler** requires a much bigger pause between the first and second movements of his 1895 *Resurrection* Symphony No. 2, demanding a full five minutes of silence as we move from the theme of death to thoughts of the afterlife. Shorter than that by 27 seconds is the most famous silence in music – namely **Cage**'s *4'33"*, premiered in 1952 and involving no playing or singing at all. And if record producer **Bill Drummond** had his way, once a year we would have a full 24 hours of silence. In 2005, in protest against the cheapening of music through its ubiquitous use in shops and restaurants, he designated 21 November No Music Day.

ANITA ZVONAR ILLUSTRATION: JONTY CLARK

MEET THE COMPOSER

Stewart Goodyear



Renaissance man: Goodyear relishes being a composer-pianist

The Canadian Stewart Goodyear is successfully juggling the careers of pianist and composer, turning in an eclectic run of recordings, recitals and commissions. Upcoming works include a Wigmore Hall commission for solo piano, two orchestral works for children and a piece for cellist Inbal Segev as part of her '20 for 2020' project.

Pianist and composer have had equal billing for me since the beginning. I was curious about orchestration since I was eight. I collected scores, the first being Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, and just seeing the different timbres of the composers and how they arrived at their own distinctive sound was fascinating.

I attended a choir school in Toronto. So, the first compositions I wrote were choral motets. My debut was a Sunday mass where they performed my *Ave Verum*; I was thrilled by that.

I composed my First Sonata for my graduation recital. It was the first time I felt I was writing in a voice that was truly mine – the harmonic language and my own sense of lyricism started there.

I was lucky to study with wonderful piano teachers vastly different from each other. Leon Fleisher, Gary Graffman and Claude Frank were my teachers at the Curtis Institute. Oxana Yablonskaya was my teacher at the Juilliard School and she couldn't be more different than those three. I loved her way of singing on the keyboard and her way of breathing. Those were very important lessons for me.

I was delighted when the composer-performer renaissance happened. In New York I had a manager who would ask me 'What are you? Are you a pianist, or a composer?' Artists who performed their own music as well as music by other people had somehow lost fashion.

My Triple Concerto is a 17-minute capriccio. I wondered what would happen if three chamber musicians came together – not necessarily each being solo musicians, but a chamber trio acting as one entity. I didn't make it easy on myself, but it was definitely a project that I thought I could have a lot of fun with.

Opera is a form I would love to get my teeth into. My grandparents on my father's side were real opera lovers, and every time I visited their place they were playing Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*. I'd love to go back to choral writing as well.

Studio Secrets

Sony signing: pianist Mao Fujita records Mozart

We reveal who's recording what and where...

Pianist ***Samantha Ege*** was in the studio in late December to record an album called *Black Renaissance Women*. It features works by trailblazing composer-pianists, many of which are premiere recordings. They include Margaret Bonds's *Spiritual Suite*, Florence Price's *Piano Concerto in One Movement* and Helen Eugenia Hagan's Piano Concerto in E minor. Lorelt releases the album in March.

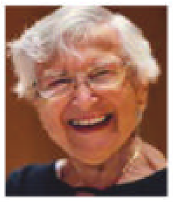
Staying at the keyboard, prize-winning Japanese pianist ***Mao Fujita*** was recently signed to Sony Classical. The young musician has wowed juries and audiences at festivals and competitions worldwide, and is set to launch his major recording career with an album of Mozart's complete piano sonatas. Sony releases the recording in the Autumn.

Sony also recently annouced a new recording project by ***Ivo Pogorelich***. It was the music of Chopin which launched the pianist's career in 1981, and he returns to the composer for the first time in 20 years. The new album, set for release in February, features a pair of Nocturnes, Piano Sonata No. 3 and the Barcarolle in F sharp major.

Prokofiev is the focus of a recent recording by clarinettist ***Ian Scott*** and pianist ***Jonathan Higgins***. The pair recorded transcriptions of suites from *Cinderella* and *Romeo & Juliet* at St John the Evangelist in Oxford. Each transcription, including some by Scott himself with Malcolm MacMillan, is a premiere recording and you can hear the results in the summer on Divine Art Records.

The ***Czech Philharmonic*** has recently announced that is is joining forces with Pentatone Records, who will distribute the orchestra's state-of -the-art recordings. Their first release, planned for early March, is an August 2020 recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 4, conducted by Semyon Bychkov at Prague's Rudolfinum and featuring soprano Chen Reiss.

EIICHI IKEDA, MEREDITH TRUAX, STEPHANE CRAYTON



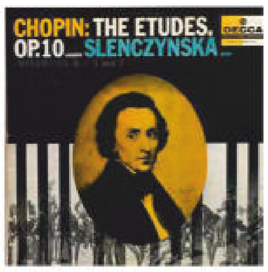
REWIND

Great artists talk about their past recordings

This month: RUTH SLENCZYNSKA *Pianist*

MY FINEST MOMENT

Chopin *24 Études, Opp 10 & 25*
Ruth Slenczynska (piano)
Decca DL 9890 & DL 9891 (1957)



My father wanted me to have a fine technique, so in order to acquire it he wanted me to master Chopin's 24 Études. This was a tremendous undertaking for me, because my hands are smaller than normal for a pianist; I had to invent ways of substituting for their size. My father required me to do all 24 of them every morning before breakfast, and I did. If you submit to this kind of work, you begin to get little insights here and there. All these little things grow and they become a style, part of your thinking and eventually part of your work. I had an opportunity to show what I could do, in what was my first major recording.

We recorded in New York; there was an old hall up past 70th Street that was for rent. So it was just a matter of putting a big piano in the middle and hanging a few microphones someplace.

A life in music: Ruth Slenczynska has enjoyed a long career at the piano keyboard

It took three weeks to make – in those days they did not have the technical ability to change or insert a note, you had to do it yourself. If you made a mistake in measure 16, forget it, you had to start again! This is quite a job and I thought it was pretty good when I made it.

MY FONDEST MEMORY

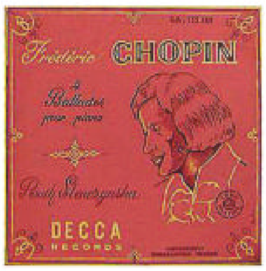
Rachmaninov *Daisies, Op. 38 No. 3*
Ruth Slenczynska (piano)
Decca 485 2606 (2021)

I can remember Mr Rachmaninov telling me about when he was a little boy, how he and his cousins were always sent to his grandmother's estate, which was called 'Ivanovka'. All the kids went there to spend the summer. After breakfast they would all go out into the hills to play, and there was this particular hill that they would climb. When they arrived at the top they saw valleys covered with glorious yellow and white daisies. The girls would all make flower garlands for their hair and around their wrists, and they'd all play tag, run and have a wonderful time in these hills. I never had this kind of summer when I was a little girl – I had to work to learn the programme for the following year – but I used to enjoy hearing him talk about it. So when I play *Daisies*, I imagine myself in this place. There's a D flat major chord on the second page, and I consider that little D flat as if I have reached the top of the hill. It's such a remarkable feeling of pleasure, beauty and wonder. He didn't write the piece until much later in his life, when he himself could look back at this wonderful feeling.

I'D LIKE ANOTHER GO AT...

Chopin *Four Ballades*
Ruth Slenczynska (piano)
Belgian Decca BA 133.182 (1953)

This was the first record that I ever did. I had done a concert in Belgium, and played one or two of the Four Ballades. A little Belgian company asked if I could record them – I actually hadn't learned one of them; I knew it of course, but I hadn't worked on it. I could do the others pretty well, so I just said, 'Oh yes, I can do the Ballades.' I figured I could put in some all-nighters and learn it so that by the time I finished the others I'd have it ready to record. They didn't have a marvellous piano, but that didn't daunt me, because it was a real, honest-to-gosh recording company. I was no longer an un-recorded pianist.

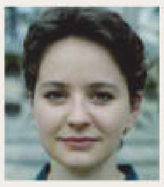


Then I didn't hear anything from them. Where was it? Later I was booked for a tour of South America and in Brazil, of all places, somebody brought me a record to autograph and it was my recording of the Ballades!

I've done them many times since and each time they've turned out differently. This is a good thing, because they should change. If you're not flexible with the way you think, you're not a good musician. I'd record it on stage, because I like having an audience to play for. It's not a performance in front of a microphone.

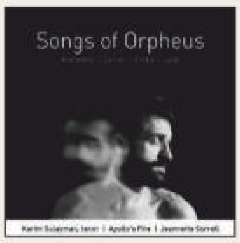
Ruth Slenczynska's new album 'My Life in Music' is out on Decca in March

BuriedTreasure



Cellist ***Laura van der Heijden*** introduces favourite recordings from her own collection

Songs of Orpheus
Karim Sulayman (tenor); Apollo's Fire/ Jeannette Sorrell *Avie AV2383*



I fell in love with Karim's voice in person, because he did some concerts with Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective. We had a long train journey together and I listened to this album. I was completely riveted from beginning to end; I was just so taken by the inventiveness of it. It's recorded in a really natural, energetic way. Each song has slightly different instrumentation, so you hear different relationships between the voice and the instruments.

Rebekah Cummings
Our Strength, Our Song
Akemi Mercer-Niewöhner (violin), Rachel Mercer (cello)
Centrediscs CMCCD27719

I came across this disc whilst doing research on pieces for cello and violin, and I was thrilled to hear so much really exciting music that I'd never come across before. This is one of those albums that ticks all the boxes for me – incredible music which is rarely played, all written by female composers and performed with intensity, richness and total dedication.

Beach **Romance, Op. 23**
Elena Urioste (violin), Michael Brown (piano) *BIS BIS-2284*

This is so good, it really grabs you. I first heard Elena playing this in concert, and have done a few times. Every time I was like 'how can someone play the violin like that?!' It's a piece that I feel was almost written for her; she has this amazing old-style sound. It's just total heart-on-the-sleeve music and it feels so natural. Every moment makes total sense, musically, and there's no note too much or too few. The recording is amazing, I've played it over and over again.

Laura van der Heijden's album 'Pohádka' is out on 28 January on Chandos

THE LISTENING SERVICE

How Satie liberated music

While late-Romanticism was at its height, a cabaret pianist was turning music on its head. **Tom Service** celebrates the legacy of the great eccentric, Erik Satie

ILLUSTRATION: MARIA CORTE MAIDAGAN

The day I visited Erik Satie's grave in Arcueil, the southern suburb of Paris where he lived and died in 1925 – as a 'great musician, person of heart, and exceptional citizen', as the epitaph says – there was a single ripe pear placed on top of the austere plinth. Which makes surreal sense, because among Satie's piano works are his *Three Pieces in the Shape of a Pear*.

Satie's music, his multi-dimensional creativity and the way he lived his life are still exemplary and visionary. He made some of the earliest music for film, he was a postmodernist *avant la lettre*, he conjured the genres of ambient music and background musak decades before the rest of the world caught up with him, and he made music that allows listeners to interpret its riddles any way we like.

This includes those pieces by Satie most familiar to us. Consider the case of the *Gymnopédies* for solo piano: music whose title comes from an ancient Greek dance for unarmed, naked men, which has become as familiar as any sounds any composer has ever conceived. The *Gymnopédies* are three little pieces whose breathtaking tranquility accompanies adverts and soundtracks, have been remixed by electronica artists and prog rockers, and two of which were orchestrated by Claude Debussy. And their lilting dissonances, their three-time play of limpid melody sighing against the bass line and triads in the middle of the texture is among the most gently radical of the late-19th century.

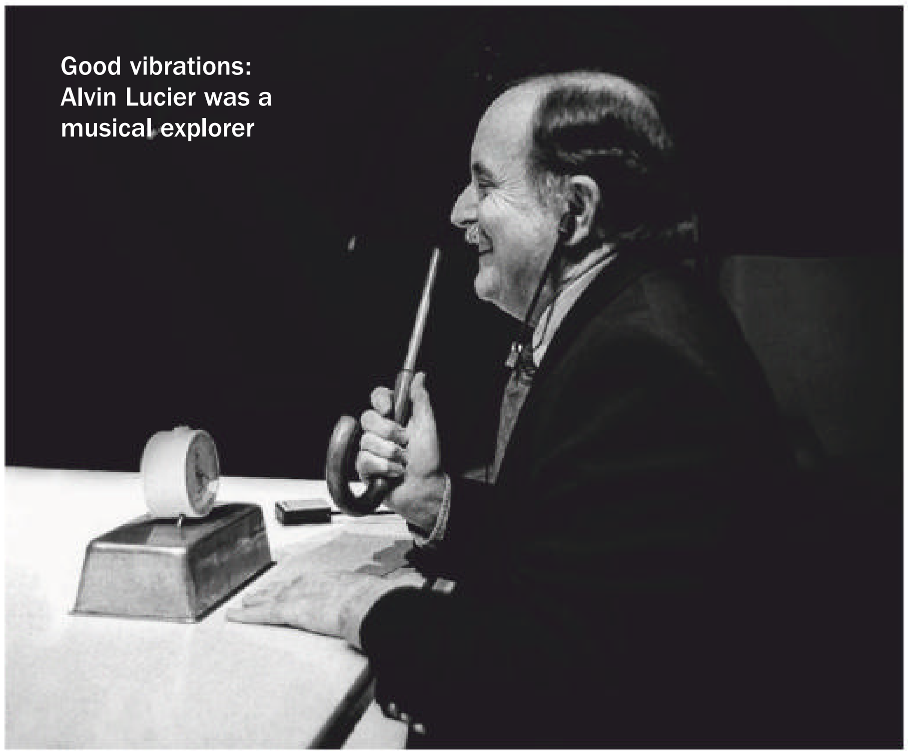
The *Gymnopédies* were made in 1888 in Montmartre, when Satie was a pianist for the emerging art-form of cabaret at the club *Le chat noir*. If you put them in context with what other composers in Europe were up to – Mahler writing his First Symphony, Richard Strauss composing *Don Juan*, Tchaikovsky, his Fifth Symphony – Satie's music may as well come from another planet. Instead of those hyper-expressive behemoths, Satie's music doesn't tell us how to feel and it doesn't create a self-conscious drama. Satie dares instead to invite us into a state of being, rather than manipulating our emotions. That's why they still sound contemporary.

Satie's music doesn't tell us how to feel, but dares to invite us into a state of being

Yet Satie's music is powerfully expressive: from the ecstasy and despair that any pianist experiences if they play his *Vexations* how he tells them to, repeating its single page precisely 840 times, lasting anywhere from 10 to 36 hours. There's the dizzying collage of his ballets and multi-media spectaculars, like *Parade* and *Relâche*, which he created with such collaborators as Pablo Picasso and René Clair. And there's *Socrate*, composed in 1919 for voice and piano or ensemble, setting the words of Plato on the death of Socrates. In this piece, Satie's principles of relentless objectivity and austerity result in some of the most strangely and powerfully moving music of the 20th century. But Satie's entire output is a treasure trove of paradox and prophecy. Explore it with surreal joy and delight – and a pear or two, too.

Tom Service explores how music works in *The Listening Service* on Sundays at 5pm

FAREWELL TO...


Good vibrations: Alvin Lucier was a musical explorer

Alvin Lucier Born 1931 *Composer*

It was while on a Fulbright Scholarship in Rome that a young Alvin Lucier experienced the work of John Cage. He also met and made friends with Frederic Rzewski in the Italian capital. Both encounters would have a big impact on the course that his own music would take. Born in New Hampshire, Lucier studied two summers at Tanglewood with Lukas Foss and Aaron Copland, with formal education at Yale and Brandeis. As a choir director at the latter institution, he would also encounter like-minded artists David Behrman, Gordon Mumma and Robert Ashley. Together they established the Sonic Arts Group (later Sonic Arts Union), touring with their cutting-edge, experimental music and sound installations. Fascinated by the possibilities of sound, Lucier's works – such as *Music on a Long Thin Wire* and *I Am Sitting in a Room* – were more concerned with aural constructs and their effects rather than melody. Aside from his creative exploits, Lucier was a firm fixture at Wesleyan University, Connecticut, where he taught from 1970.

Carlos Marín Born 1968 *Baritone*

Marín's worldwide fame as one quarter of the multi-million-selling vocal group Il Divo is just part of the Spanish baritone's life in music. Though born in Germany, he spent formative years in Madrid and was a precocious talent. Dubbed 'Carlos The Little Caruso', he had recorded two albums by the age of ten. Marín received coaching from the likes of Montserrat Caballé and Alfredo Kraus, and would enjoy a varied stage career that would see him perform in both opera and musical theatre – indeed he was just as at home in *Les Misérables* as he was in *La traviata*. In 2003, producer Simon Cowell oversaw the formation of an international vocal quartet and Il Divo was born. Together with David Miller, Urs Bühler and Sébastien Izambard, Marín would attract an enormous following, selling out venues across the globe and notching up some 28 million album sales over the last 17 years.

Also remembered...

German pianist **Evelinde Trenker** (*born 1933*) studied with both Walter Gieseking and Wilhelm Kempff. She was the artistic director of the International Lübeck Chamber Music Festival.

Andrei Hoteev (*born 1946*), a Leningrad-born Russian pianist, gained a reputation for his research, performance and recording of original versions of works by, in particular, Musorgsky and Tchaikovsky.

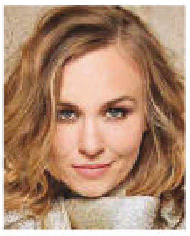
GETTY

French obsession: chanteuse Barbara Pravi has a big fan in soprano Elsa Dreisig

Music to my ears

What the classical world has been listening to this month

Elsa Dreisig Soprano



I am a little bit obsessed with **Barbara Pravi**, a young chanteuse. I wouldn't say it's pop music, but it's very French in style. I really love her *Prière aux rêves*, which is a concept based on a lot of prayers – prayers to beauty, prayers to birds, prayers to music. They have nothing religious in them, but it's just beautiful. She's very poetic and I also like her personality and the way she shares her art.

I listen to **Maria Callas**'s recordings of all the roles I sing. I have just sung the title role in Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*, and this is Callas's signature role, so she was my main inspiration. I cry every time I listen to her. I'm not saying she's perfect – I don't like the idea of perfection anyway, because it doesn't have to be. I really see her incredible strength and the art she lives for; I can hear that in her voice and it's very inspiring.

John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* is something I have been brought to. This is not music from my childhood, my family or friends at school; it's something I have learned to like as a grown-up. It's a kind of education, because I don't think this kind of jazz is easy to listen to at the beginning. Sometimes it's good to really go deep down into an album before liking it 100 per cent, and this has been the process with Coltrane.

> 'I can really hear Callas's strength and the art she lives for in her voice'

And also...
The boyfriend of a friend of mine created a guide to recognise **city birds** – really normal little birds that we have all around us. My husband and I went to the woods during lockdown and started to record the birdsong we were hearing. We would also take pictures, find it in the guide and then put the singing with the picture. Now I just adore when I am in the city; I know which bird it is and how it looks.
Elsa Dreisig's album 'Mozart x 3' is out on Erato on 28 January

CRITIC'S CHOICE

Christopher Dingle
Having had it on my listening pile for two years, I have finally had the pleasure of exploring Philip Thomas's five-disc survey of **Morton Feldman**'s exquisitely quirky piano works. It is a real treasure trove of delights, ranging from brief miniatures to the 90 minutes of sustained restraint of *Triadic Memories*. Each moment is a meticulously crafted pearl, elegantly conveyed by Thomas in a masterclass of pianistic control, intelligence and integrity.

Julian Azkoul
Violinist and director

Since the start of the pandemic I've been listening to a lot more vocal music, and I've been really enjoying *Aromanticism*, the 2017 release by the American singer-songwriter **Moses Sumney**. His style of writing is like a mix between pop with soul and jazz harmonies, and it's quite a whimsical album. His lyrics are quite hard to make out sometimes, but in fact I like just drilling into the sound of his voice without being so focused on the words the whole time.

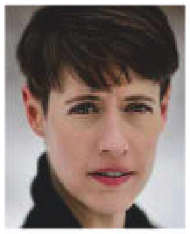
The **Manchester Collective**'s *The Centre is Everywhere* is a great first album, with quite a variety of repertoire – Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, Philip Glass's *Company* String Quartet and the title track, a really beautiful new work by Edmund Finnis. I've known about this ensemble since its launch about five years ago, and I really admire its programming and that they commission a lot of new music. It's great that there seems to be such an appetite for string groups such as this.

My brother, Michael Azkoul, goes under the stage name of **Dr Koul** as a rap artist, and he has a group called Captains of the Imagination. I'm not greatly into rap, but he has a real affinity for it and so through him I've come to listen to it more generally. His

group's album, *When The Moon Goes Around The Sun*, is just fantastic – uplifting, charming and engaging, it takes on everyday life and how we consider ourselves and treat others.

And also...
I'm quite into film and have missed being able to go to the **cinema** in recent months. That said, I did go to see *Dune* (above), which I recommend as it's very entertaining. In particular, there was something very visceral and minimalist about Hans Zimmer's score that I found very effective.
Julian Azkoul directs United Strings of Europe in 'Renewal', out now on the BIS label

Cecilia Livingston Composer



I am a sucker for live performance – it's my favourite way of encountering work that was originally designed for that mode of presentation, and I like disappearing into the audience and being completely absorbed. In 2019, I saw a semi-staged performance of **Britten**'s *Peter Grimes* at the Royal Festival Hall with tenor Stuart Skelton and the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra under Edward Gardner. It's so lucky it was captured for a recording. Operatic storytelling is often criticised for being too straight-forward and one-dimensional, but Britten revels in ambiguity and multiple meanings.

Not ropey at all: Stuart Skelton as Grimes

I was able to study with **David Lang** and the Bang on a Can ensemble co-founders, and I've recently been reintroduced to Lang's choral work *The Little Match Girl Passion*. I'm really interested in the collective choral voice and how it can be used in musical storytelling. The chamber choir and four soloists play very simple percussion instruments and, as is the case in all Lang's music, the writing is very spare – but it has an operatic, emotional power to it.

It's rare that I'm caught by a TV score, but **David Buckley**'s music for *The Good Wife* and its sequel *The Good Fight* grabbed me with its wit and delightfully clever musical storytelling. Buckley uses a neo-Baroque language, which feels like a sly comment on contemporary TV scoring clichés plus there's something about the bustle of a law office and its political machinations that does feel a little Baroque.

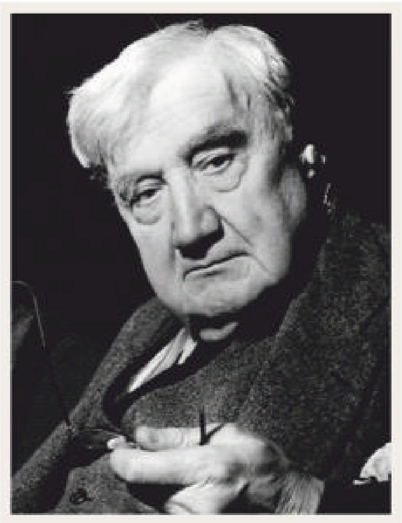
And also...
Reading physical, smelly library books has become my lockdown antidote for too much screentime. I'm looking into texts for a song cycle I'm going to work on in future, so have revisited the writing of the poet **Anne Michaels**. It's magnificently deft, particularly her collection *The Weight of Oranges*.
Cecilia Livingston is co-composer of the youth opera Pay the Piper, which premieres at Glyndebourne, 25-27 February

CRITIC'S CHOICE

Jessica Duchen
My winter treat has been the Bayerische Staatsoper's DVD of **Korngold**'s *Die tote Stadt*. Simon Stone's production is contemporary, quirky, heart-rending: here Marie has died of cancer and we can truly buy in to Paul's agonised bereavement and ultimate acceptance of his loss. Marlis Petersen as Marie/Marietta and Jonas Kaufmann as Paul are a dream team, and Kirill Petrenko's conducting sets the music's white-hot passion blazing out, the orchestra matching everyone on stage for virtuosity. I doubt it could be bettered.

Our Choices The *BBC Music Magazine* team's current favourites

Jeremy Pound *Acting editor*
With ***Vaughan Williams***'s (right) 150th anniversary on the horizon, I imagine we'll be hearing a fair amount of his music over the coming months. I've been listening repeatedly to his Fifth Symphony in the new transcription for organ by David Briggs, broadcast from Coventry Cathedral on Radio 3 in late 2021. Organ transcriptions of orchestral works can sometimes sound a little contrived, but this ideally captured the spirit and atmosphere of the original while still managing to showcase the cathedral's mighty Harrison and Harrison instrument.



Alice Pearson *Cover CD editor*
It seems appropriate as we battle through the coldest and iciest months of the year to listen again to ***Schubert***'s *Winterreise* song cycle. I spotted an excellent free online performance by the celebrated tenor and scholar Ian Bostridge, who has also written a book about the work with each song analysed in depth. While rather far from the most optimistic subject matter, Schubert's song-writing skills nonetheless make *Winterreise* an absorbing and uplifting musical experience.

Michael Beek *Reviews editor*
I think I've become a bit of a ***Manchester Collective*** groupie. I recently encountered members of the ensemble at a bar called Strange Brew in Bristol, where they performed a programme called 'Heavy Metal'. In a haze of dry ice, and before an impressively trendy young audience, they performed works for string quartet and percussion. I loved Ben Nobuto's brilliant *Serenity 2.0*, which was anything but serene. Percussionist Beibei Wang was dynamite throughout.

Freya Parr *Digital editor and staffwriter*
Someday I will make my inaugural trip to Glyndebourne, but for now I'm lucky enough to catch Glyndebourne's touring company in the glamorous setting of Milton Keynes for a performance of ***Donizetti***'s comic opera *Don Pasquale*. With innovative set design and a truly witty interpretation of the score, it was an absolute hoot. Praise must go to the postgraduate guitarists, Ross Morris and George Robinson, who joined the cast on stage for Korean tenor Konu Kim's colourful performance of the Act III aria 'Com'è gentil'.

GETTY, SIMON FOWLER, ALEXANDER DENINO, ROBERT WORKMAN

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RAVEL
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Marius Neset
Sinfonia of London | John Wilson

Sinfonia of London and John Wilson turn to orchestral works of Ravel for this their sixth studio album. Opening with *La Valse*, the album includes first recordings of the original versions of the ballets *Ma Mère l'Oye* (Mother Goose) and *Boléro*, the latter featuring antiphonal snare drums (amongst other changes). Recorded in surround-sound and released as a Hybrid SACD.

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POHÁDKA
TALES FROM PRAGUE TO BUDAPEST

Laura van der Heijden
Jâms Coleman

Music meets storytelling in Laura van der Heijden and Jâms Coleman's début release for Chandos. Entitled *Pohádka* (Tale), the programme explores the rich folk melodies of Janáček, Kodály, and Dvořák

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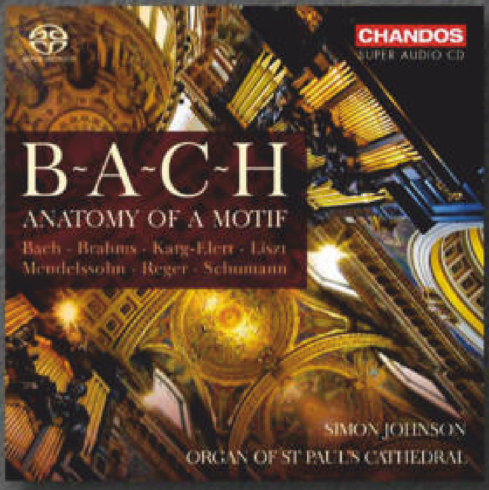
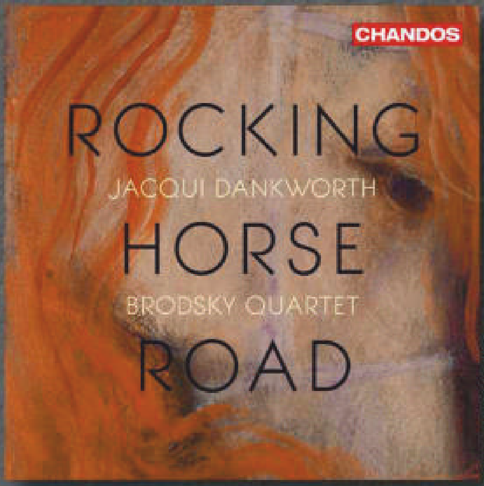


CHSA 5285(2)

B-A-C-H
ANATOMY OF A MOTIF

Simon Johnson

Bach's musical signature has directly influenced scores of other composers, including those featured here. Simon Johnson's programme demonstrates the extraordinary range and scope of the organ of St Paul's Cathedral.



CHAN 20219

ROCKING HORSE ROAD

Jacqui Dankworth | Brodsky Quartet

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Richard Morrison

Why the early music revolution of the 1970s was truly a moment to savour

With some disbelief, I realise that it's half a century since I attended my first early-music concert – at the 1972 BBC Proms. It was a thrilling night, because the sounds conjured up by that virtuosic pioneer David Munrow and his Early Music Consort of London were so new, so challenging, so revolutionary. So was the music, even though it had been composed four or five centuries earlier. Who then had heard of Hermann Finck, Jacobus Barbireau or Hans Kotter? Come to think of it, who has heard of them now? Munrow, who died tragically and much too early, had a knack for digging out complete rarities from the Medieval and Renaissance eras and bringing them to life so flamboyantly that you felt as if you had been transported to the Field of the Cloth of Gold itself.

He wasn't alone. The early 1970s were full of brilliant young musicians determined to overthrow anachronistic, Romanticised approaches to old music, and do so with panache. In that same Proms season, John Eliot Gardiner conducted Monteverdi's Vespers in Westminster Cathedral, and even over the radio the lean, incisive singing and playing sounded as daring as Stockhausen or Birtwistle. Nikolaus Harnoncourt's provocative recordings of German and French Baroque music horrified some but delighted many more.

And when Christopher Hogwood brought out his legendary recording of Handel's *Messiah* a few years later – period instruments, boy trebles, lightning speeds and, most mesmerising of all, Emma Kirkby's laser-like voice soaring through the soprano solos – it was as if someone had put a bomb under the 200-year-old tradition of performing Handel's choral works with massive forces. Of course, with hindsight we may feel that the performances created by Hogwood or Harnoncourt said more about late-20th-century sensibilities than about how music actually sounded in the 1700s. That didn't matter at the time. They were different. They shocked.

There are some things that I don't miss about those early years of the early-music movement. One is the fierce polarity between various camps. It wasn't just that period-instrument players asserted that theirs was the 'authentic' and only true way to perform Baroque music (a claim nobody is foolish enough to make any more). Or that, on the other side, players in symphony orchestras regularly caricatured period-instrumentalists as failed musicians who couldn't play in tune. There were also bitter rivalries within the early-music movement itself.

> I miss that feeling of new worlds being revealed and old preconceptions being challenged

It was quite fun for a journalist if a leading scholar-performer spent a whole interview telling you why a rival's version of (to take one infamous example) Bach's Mass in B minor was misconceived in every possible way. But I'm not sure it was good for those working in the field if they were constantly made to feel like participants in a latter-day Hundred Years War. It wasn't until the 1990s or even later that a new, more flexibly minded generation of musicians appeared, enabling symphony orchestras to do passable impressions of 'historically informed' performances where required and, on the other side, period-instrument bands to bring back some of the lusher expressive devices ruthlessly ditched by their dogmatic forerunners.

Two things, however, I miss a lot. One is Medieval music. It's not that nobody performs pre-Renaissance dances or vocal music any more, but Munrow managed to bring it into the mainstream of concert life and attract a big following. Nobody does that now. People pay lip-service to the concept of 'nine centuries of classical music', but in reality few groups perform anything before Tallis, and most early-instrument concerts are of 18th-and 19th-century music. In other words, the mainstream repertoire has shrunk back to what it was before period instruments came along.

The other thing I miss is the thirst for rediscovery and scholarship that infused so many early-music pioneers. How many of today's ensemble leaders go back to primary sources – composers' manuscripts or vivid accounts of social and cultural conditions in earlier centuries – to enrich their understanding of the music? How many are prepared to spend days, maybe months, rooting around in dusty libraries to find music that deserves resuscitation?

I don't deny that the technical standards of today's musicians are, on the whole, streets ahead of what I heard in the 1970s. But I miss today the feeling of new worlds being revealed and old preconceptions challenged. I don't think that's just nostalgia talking.

Richard Morrison is chief music critic and a columnist of The Times

BBC music MAGAZINE AWARDS2022

VOTE NOW and help to name the best classical recordings of the past 12 months

It has been an incredible year, with artists and labels delivering top-class recordings during another challenging period. We're delighted to present the nominations for the BBC Music Magazine Awards 2022, including those for our Premiere and Newcomer awards. Who wins is up to you, so visit classical-music.com/awards for full nominee details and to cast your vote. Voting closes at midnight on Monday 28 February, with the winners being announced at the end of April.

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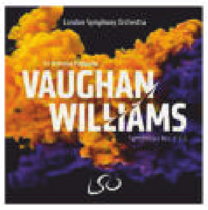
Orchestral nominations

F Price
Symphonies Nos 1 & 3
Philadelphia Orchestra/
Yannick Nézet-Séguin
Deutsche Grammophon 486 2029 Reviewed Christmas 2021

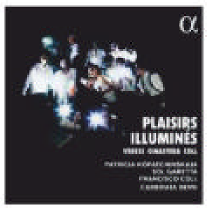


Vaughan Williams
Symphonies Nos 4 & 6
London Symphony Orchestra/
Antonio Pappano
LSO Live LSO0867 Reviewed June 2021

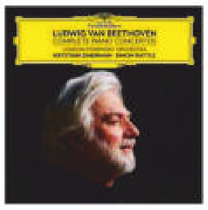
Dutilleux *Le Loup etc*
Sinfonia of London/
John Wilson
Chandos CHSA 5263
Reviewed August 2021

Concerto nominations

Bartók • Martinů
Martinů: *Violin Concertos Nos 1 & 2;*
Bartók: *Solo Sonata*
Frank Peter Zimmermann (violin); Bamberg Symphony/Jakub Hrůša
BIS BIS-2457 Reviewed February 2021



Plaisirs illuminés
Patricia Kopatchinskaja (violin), Sol Gabetta (cello); Camerata Bern et al
Alpha Classics ALPHA580
Reviewed March 2021

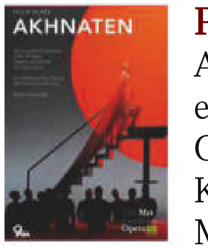


Beethoven
Piano Concertos
Krystian Zimerman (piano); London Symphony Orchestra/Simon Rattle
Deutsche Grammophon 483 9971
Reviewed September 2021

Opera nominations

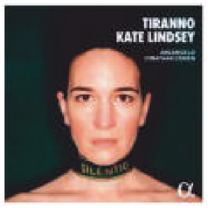
Handel *Ariodante*
Cecilia Bartoli et al; Les Musiciens du Prince Monaco/Gianluca Capuano; dir. Christof Loy (Salzburg, 2017)
Unitel DVD 802408
Reviewed September 2021

Handel *Rodelinda*
Lucy Crowe, Iestyn Davies et al; The English Concert/ Harry Bicket
Linn Records CKD658
Reviewed July 2021



Philip Glass *Akhnaten*
Anthony Roth Costanzo et al; Metropolitan Opera Orchestra & Chorus/Karen Kamensek; dir. Phelim McDermott (NYC, 2019)
Orange Mountain Music DVD OMM5011
Reviewed Christmas 2021

Vocal nominations



Tiranno
Kate Lindsey (mezzo-soprano); Arcangelo/ Jonathan Cohen
Alpha Classics ALPHA736
Reviewed September 2021

Phidylé
Kateřina Kněžíková (soprano); Janáček Philharmonic/ Robert Jindra
Supraphon SU42962
Reviewed August 2021

Baritenor
Michael Spyres (baritone); Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg/ Marko Letonja
Erato 9029515666
Reviewed November 2021

Choral nominations

Dussek *Messe Solemnelle*
Academy of Ancient Music/Richard Egarr
AAM AAM011
Reviewed January 2021

JS Bach *Cantatas, BWV 32, 82 & 106*
Dunedin Consort/ John Butt
Linn Records CKD672
Reviewed December 2021

Arvo Pärt • Schnittke *Choral Works*
Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir/ Kaspars Putniņš
BIS BIS-2521 *Reviewed October 2021*

Chamber nominations

Ravel • Saint-Saëns *Piano Trios*
Sitkovetsky Trio
BIS BIS-2219
Reviewed October 2021

American Quintets
Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective
Chandos CHAN 20224
Reviewed August 2021

The Mad Lover
Thomas Dunford (lute), Théotime Langlois de Swarte (violin)
Harmonia Mundi HMM902305 *Reviewed January 2021*

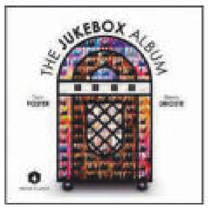
Instrumental nominations

Paganini *24 Caprices*
Alina Ibragimova (violin)
Hyperion CDA68366
Reviewed July 2021

Busoni *Piano Works*
Peter Donohoe (piano)
Chandos CHAN 20237
Reviewed October 2021

On DSCH *Works by Shostakovich and R Stevenson*
Igor Levit (piano)
Sony Classical 19439809212
Reviewed December 2021

Premiere nominations



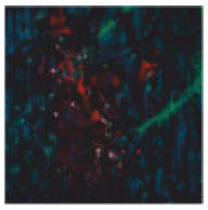
The Jukebox Album *Works by Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Clarice Assad, Jesse Montgomery et al*
Elena Urioste (violin), Tom Poster (piano)
Orchid Classics ORC100173
Reviewed November 2021

Sebastian Fagerlund *Oceano etc*
Meta4 String Quartet et al
BIS BIS-2324
Reviewed Christmas 2021

Louis Andriessen *The Only One*
Nora Fischer (soprano); Los Angeles Philharmonic/ Esa-Pekka Salonen
Nonesuch 7559791733
Reviewed April 2021

Newcomer nominations

Heart & Hereafter *Coleridge-Taylor Songs*
Elizabeth Llewellyn (soprano)
Orchid Classics ORC100164
Reviewed August 2021



The Centre is Everywhere *Works by Edmund Finnis et al*
Manchester Collective
Bedroom Community HVALUR38
Reviewed June 2021

Passione *Tenor arias by Puccini, Tosti et al*
Freddie De Tommaso (tenor)
Decca 485 1509
Reviewed July 2021

For full information about each of the nominated recordings, please visit **classical-music.com/awards**

‘Practise, practise, practise’: Jascha Heifetz plays his ‘walking stick’ practice violin aboard a liner; (opposite) the young prodigy; his great Russian teacher, Leopold Auer

GETTY

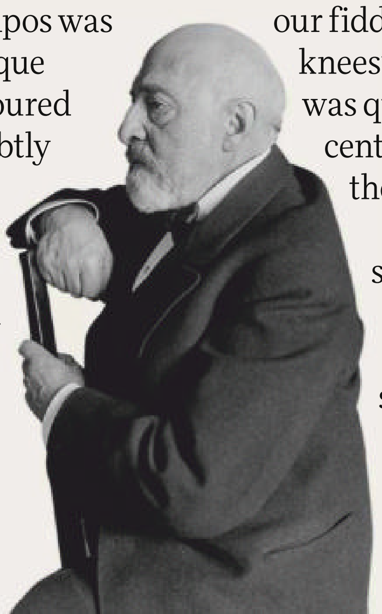
The great perfectionist

Jascha Heifetz's formidable technique and instantly recognisable sound made him a superstar among violinists, but behind that seemingly effortless ability lay hard graft and a generous heart, as Julian Haylock explains

Jascha Heifetz was a phenomenon. His playing sounded like no one else's, and his immaculately honed technique and unflappable stage presence created an aura of invincibility. A perfectionist in all things musical, he insisted that 'the discipline of practice every day is essential. When I skip a day, I notice a difference in my playing. After two days, the critics notice, and after three days, so does the audience!'

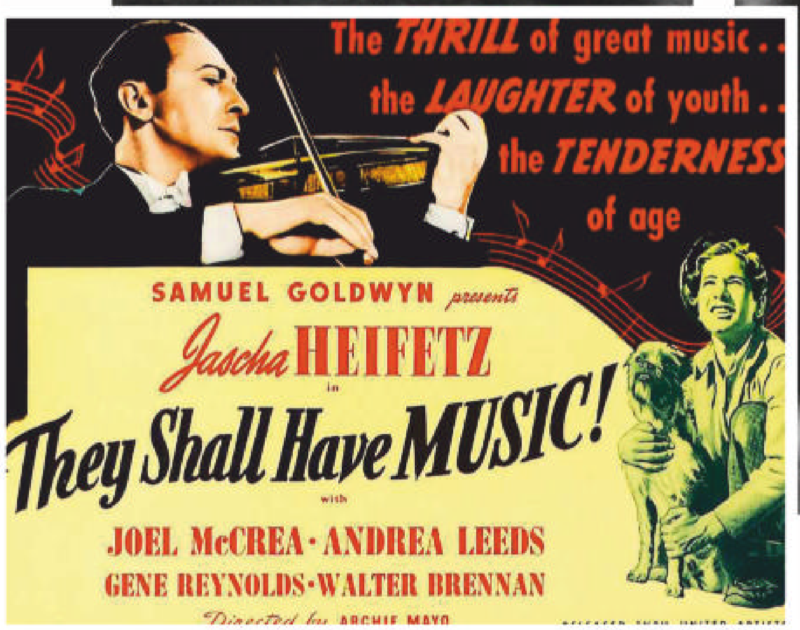
As Heifetz saw it, 'there is no top – there are always further heights to reach'. His preference for fast, flowing tempos was facilitated by a dazzling technique and a clear-focused sound, coloured by a fast-narrow vibrato and subtly warmed by his preference for plain gut (as opposed to steel-wound/metal) D and A strings. Adding to the sensation of unflappable calm were his impassive facial features and no-nonsense, free-flowing bowing action. Although in concert Heifetz produced a luminous sound, on disc (especially in later years) he preferred a relatively close, almost analytical image, free of ambient cushioning.

It was the tantalising gulf between Heifetz's cool demeanour and the molten intensity of his playing that so fascinated his audiences. The legendary Fritz Kreisler – Heifetz's own favourite violinist – was so affected by his incandescent virtuosity that he despaired 'we might as well take our fiddles and break them across our knees'. For Itzhak Perlman, Heifetz was quite simply 'the violinist of the century. There's basically Heifetz – then all the rest!'



As if to add to the mystique surrounding his playing, Heifetz drily summed up his early career in one short sentence: 'Born in Russia,

A player with many fans: (clockwise, from right) Heifetz chills; with Charlie Chaplin; with his second wife Frances, 1950s; an ad for his HMV records; a poster for the 1939 film *They Shall Have Music*



first lessons at three, debut in Russia at seven, debut in America in 1917. That's all there is to say, really.' Born in Lithuania (then part of the Russian Empire) in 1901, Heifetz's first teacher was his father, a capable player who quickly realised he was dealing with a talent way beyond his own. Remarkably, in only four years, Jascha progressed from an infant beginner to playing the Mendelssohn E minor Concerto on a half-sized violin to an astonished audience of over a thousand.

Three years later, aged just ten, Heifetz began lessons with the renowned pedagogue Leopold Auer, who appears to have taught his students more by a process of friendly coercion than strict task-setting. 'Don't ask me how he did it,' Heifetz reflected, 'for I would not know how to tell you.' Auer was far too astute a teacher to let his admiration show unduly, but in a private letter admitted 'in all my 50 years of violin teaching, I have never known such precocity'. While still Auer's student, Heifetz established his early reputation, including making his Berlin concerto debut at short notice, aged only 11, playing the Tchaikovsky under conductor Arthur Nikisch. According to one onlooker, the tumultuous applause Heifetz received that night was encouraged from the platform by the normally restrained Nikisch and the players of the Berlin Philharmonic. The Tchaikovsky became one of Heifetz's signature pieces, a work he felt was 'already so overloaded with sentiment, that all you have to do is play the notes – it will come out anyway!'

By the time Heifetz and his family left Russia prior to the October Revolution in 1917, bound for the US, his reputation had preceded him. Yet nothing could have prepared the audience for the incendiary playing at his Carnegie Hall debut recital (with pianist André Benoist) on 27 October 1917. Stories surrounding this career-defining concert are now legion, yet even the coolest examination of the evidence leaves little doubt that Heifetz's playing of (amongst other things) Paganini's Caprice No. 24 and Wieniawski's Second Concerto created a sensation. The newspapers were buzzing with news of the wunderkind (Heifetz was still only 16 at the time), including a review in the *New York World* that reported: 'Nothing that he undertook was without a finish so complete, so carefully considered and worked out, that its betterment did not seem possible.'

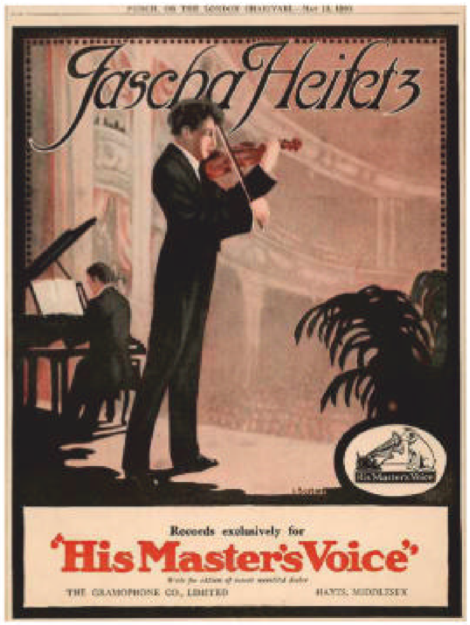
Heifetz's precision and keen musical focus were ideal for the recording studio

Among the musical glitterati that night was violin virtuoso Mischa Elman, a former Auer pupil of an older generation. According to one story which hit the popular press, turning towards his pianist friend Leopold Godowsky, Elman muttered 'It's getting awfully hot in here,' to which Godowsky replied, with a knowing twinkle in his eye: 'Not for pianists!'

Just two weeks later, Heifetz cut his first discs for the Victor Talking Machine Company (later RCA Victor), effectively marking the start (a few early Russian and domestic German takes aside) of a recording career spanning some 55 years. Today, when we can stream almost anything, it is easy to forget just how revolutionary the recording process was at that time. Music lovers could now, in the comfort of their own homes, listen repeatedly to musicians they had never seen perform live. Within a very short space of time, musicians' reputations became founded upon their recorded rather than concert legacy.

When Heifetz made his London Queen's Hall debut in 1920, RCA could already boast sales of around 70,000 units in Britain alone. Heifetz's reputation hadn't just preceded him by word of mouth – many fans had a fair idea of what they were in for before Heifetz had even played a note on English soil.

The new(ish) recording technology had its downsides, however. In order to squeeze their interpretations onto existing



side-lengths (around 3-5 minutes, depending on disc size), some artists had little choice but to gently speed up their interpretations. Others found the pressure of producing a 'clean' take incredibly stressful, resulting in countless retakes, while others found the need to keep reasonably still and limit extraneous noises to a minimum inhibiting. Such strictures played to Heifetz's strengths. His rapier-like precision, keen musical focus and absolute physical discipline were tailor-made for the recording process.

Another important factor that made Heifetz's recordings so unusually compelling was his lack of reliance on stagecraft when playing 'live' to enhance the musical impact of his performances. For Heifetz, everything he wished to express was concentrated in the microcosmic perfection of his playing. Nothing was left to chance and was worked out down to the last detail beforehand.

This gave him the necessary freedom (like fellow violinist Nathan Milstein) to improvise fingerings as the mood took him. In that respect, every performance and recording became part of a continual learning curve.

For some listeners, the results could sometimes feel almost glacial in their cool perfection. Yet the essential difference between Heifetz and his peers was really a matter of degree. He spoke the same musical language, but did so with such fine-tuned reflexes that if you musically 'blinked', even for a second, you would almost certainly miss something. There were also those who felt Heifetz tended to overshadow his partners when playing chamber music, even with 'Million Dollar Trio' co-members, pianist Arthur Rubinstein and cellist Gregor Piatigorsky. But, as the young André Previn (among others) pointed out, this wasn't so much a case of his playing too forcefully, but rather because 'he was musically so much more interesting than everyone else'.

Heifetz's recordings played an important role in establishing the Sibelius, Elgar and Glazunov concertos, Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy* and JS Bach's Solo Sonatas and Partitas (among others) as repertoire standards. And some of his most treasurable playing on disc can be ▶

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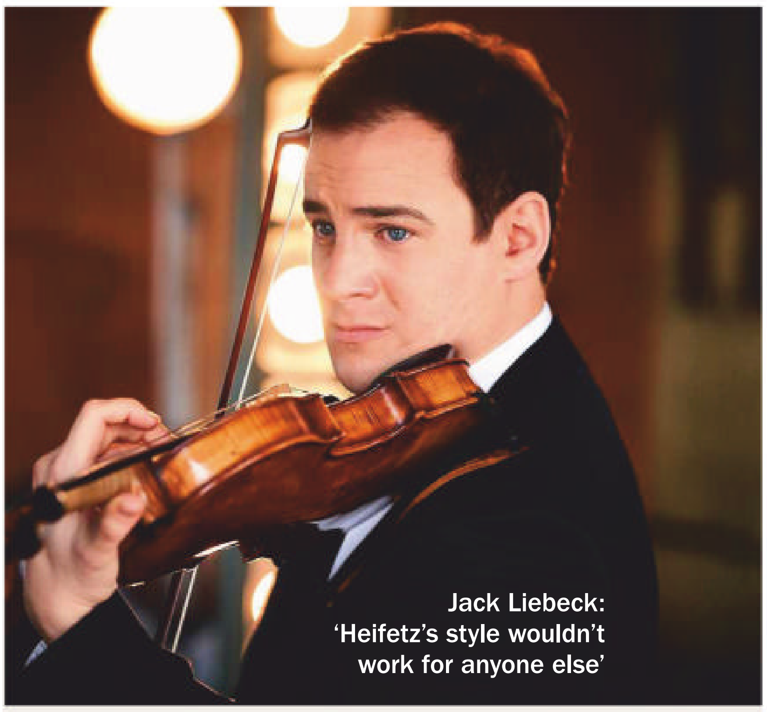

Jack Liebeck: 'Heifetz's style wouldn't work for anyone else'

A view from the violin

Jack Liebeck on Jascha Heifetz

'Heifetz was my violin idol from a young age, and I loved listening to his recordings right from the beginning. We get influenced by our teachers, of course, and my teacher idolised him and got me onto him as well.

'With Heifetz, it's all about the singing line. You can hear where the passage work or melody is going almost from the moment he begins playing it – it's as if it's laser-guided. That said, listening today with more mature, critical ears, there's a case for saying he tends to be rushing the whole time. And in a way, he did, in a manner that must have made it impossible to perform with him if you were a conductor. When I listen to some of his recordings, I wonder how the conductor can have kept up with him!

'The most dangerous thing you can do as a violinist is to try to play like him. Heifetz's style was so unique to him and wouldn't work for anyone else. He had this way of playing that, as well as being electric in its intensity, was incredibly agile – he could turn on a sixpence. There are some famous masterclasses that you can find online where he is trying to teach people how to play little filigree passages in showpieces. He just puts the bow on the string and does his thing, but other people simply can't do it like that! You just have to let him be.

'There was a fashion at one point for saying "Oh, I don't like Heifetz; he's too cold", but for me, he is still one of the greatest – up there in the top couple. The player who, perhaps, was most like him was Nathan Milstein, who had that same drive, but was more understandable in violinistic terms for us mere mortals!'

Serving great causes: Heifetz, whose benevolence became legendary, here rehearses with Arthur Rubinstein for a concert in aid of British War Relief and the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, 1940

found in the Korngold, Rózsa, Walton and Castelnuovo-Tedesco No. 2 (*I profeti*) concertos, all written in a post-Romantic idiom and premiered by Heifetz. Yet he was not all that taken with 'modern' music in general. 'I play works by contemporary composers for two reasons,' he once claimed. 'First, to discourage the composer from writing any more, and secondly to remind myself how good Beethoven is.'

Between his 1917 US debut and his final public appearance in 1974 at the University of Southern California alongside Piatigorsky, Heifetz sustained the same impregnable musical poise and implacable stage presence. As he once put it, 'If I don't smile, it's only because I'm so absorbed in my playing that I forget everything else.' He owned several important violins during his career, but the one he valued above all others was a 1742 Guarneri del Gesù once owned by Ferdinand David (1810-73), dedicatee of the Mendelssohn E minor Violin Concerto. His preferred bow was a Nikolai Kittel given to him by Auer.

Heifetz was a generous donator, not only of instruments and bows to his students, but by giving numerous benefit concerts for various good causes. In 1919 he appeared at the Metropolitan Opera House with fellow émigré Sergei Rachmaninov, raising a small fortune to help offset the government deficit following the First World War. During the Second World War, he gave innumerable concerts, often at great risk to his personal safety, playing from the back of a touring flatbed truck in and near war zones. Countless are the stories of his deep concern for injured soldiers, in whose company he would allow the 'mask' to drop, tell jokes and share reminiscences. Ironically, the greatest threats to Heifetz's life came after the war, when in 1953 he was attacked in Jerusalem by a man wielding a crowbar for playing Richard Strauss's Violin Sonata (Heifetz having done so despite requests by Israeli officials not to do so), and in 1959 when he slipped on a floor in a Beverley Hills delicatessen, fractured his hip and almost died from the resulting infection.

Jascha Heifetz gave innumerable benefit concerts during the Second World War

A right shoulder injury finally persuaded Heifetz to retire from public performance, although he went on playing in private with pupils and colleagues. In the meantime, he accepted two university teaching posts and became one of the most notoriously exacting mentors in history. For Heifetz, violin playing was a 'perishable art' that 'must be passed on as a personal skill – otherwise it is lost'. He stressed especially the importance of scales for technical and intonational accuracy – not just in single notes but in consecutive thirds and tenths. He taught over 150 pupils during his ten-year stint at the University of Southern California, and afterwards continued to teach privately. Those who passed Heifetz's uncompromising regime to become soloists in their own right included Erick Friedman, Eugene Fodor and, most notably, Pierre Amoyal, to whom Heifetz gifted a beautiful Vuillaume violin.

Heifetz died on 10 December 1987 following a brain haemorrhage, a few weeks short of his 87th birthday. Widely mourned, behind his austere stage presence was a man who cared passionately about a range of causes. He was a devoted union supporter and became so concerned about the air quality in LA that he had his car converted to electric power long before it became fashionable. He was also a gifted mimic (especially of other violinists), an accomplished pianist with a penchant for breaking into tin-pan alley classics and jazz, a fine arranger of around 150 pieces, and composed the popular song 'When You Make Love to Me (Don't Make Believe)' under the pseudonym 'Jim Hoyl', a light-hearted alter ego he adopted away from the glare of public celebrity.

Above all, Heifetz's tremendous sense of humour made him the heart and soul of any gathering. His self-deprecating wit extended to his directing a performance of 'Tales from Vienna Woods' dressed as Johann Strauss II (complete with tuxedo and mustachios) at a benefit concert which helped save the Metropolitan Opera House from imminent closure.

But perhaps the most poignant of all Heifetz stories concerns his being stopped in New York's Manhattan district and asked by a music fan how to get to Carnegie Hall. Without missing a beat, the great man replied: 'Practise, practise, practise!'

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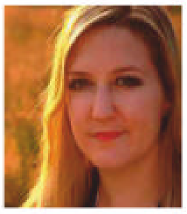
“When I first started, there were still music shops that didn’t know where to place my music”

THE BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE INTERVIEW

Ludovico Einaudi



His fans may run into the millions but, the pianist and composer tells **Claire Jackson**, his style of writing will always struggle to find total acceptance within the classical music world

PHOTOGRAPHY: RAY TARANTINO

Ludovico Einaudi has a special manuscript displayed in his studio. It’s a student piece of his, with corrections from a surprising mentor: Karlheinz Stockhausen. When the renowned avant-gardist came to Milan during the early 1980s, the young Einaudi was a keen attendee at his lectures. ‘It was a very important experience for me,’ says the Italian pianist and composer, smiling at my surprised expression. ‘At the time, Stockhausen was writing *Licht* [his seven-opera series – *Donnerstag*, *Samstag* and *Montag* were premiered at La Scala], which uses the idea of composing to a formula. I loved the idea that a week of music could be contained in a single seed. It’s something that has stayed with me. Of course, my language is very different to Stockhausen.’

‘Different’ is a wry understatement. Stockhausen’s electronic and aleatoric works are considered among contemporary music’s most advanced achievements, but not, as one editor has said to me, ‘the sort of thing one hums after the concert’. Einaudi, on the other hand, specialises in hummable melodies – according to the Official Charts, his music is currently streamed over a million times a day, played everywhere from arena concerts to yoga classes. Should you ever see a ‘play me – I’m yours’ piano at a shopping centre, someone at some point is sure to sit down and tap out a little Einaudi.

But Einaudi’s greatest achievement is the re-popularisation of the celebrity pianist-composer, developing the legacy left by Liszt. Whereas the Hungarian virtuoso pushed the newly invented piano to its limits, the strings are more likely to remain intact after an Einaudi concert. But while the Italian takes a much softer, less technically demanding approach, his music appears just as impactful on its audience. The poet Heinrich Heine described the frenzied behaviour at a Liszt concert as ‘Lisztomania’, and according to biographer Oliver Hilmes ‘Women tore

at each other's hair in trying to lay hands on a glass or handkerchief that Liszt had used'. In 2014, after Einaudi's *In A Time Lapse* concert at the 11,000-capacity Arena di Verona, I witnessed a 21st-century equivalent. As Einaudi signed a group of breathless teenagers' scores, one girl proffered her arm and insisted the composer inked it. After a moment's hesitation, he obliged. 'I will get tattoo,' the young woman assured me.

I remind Einaudi about this incident, wondering whether it was unusual. 'I have met several people who have my notes tattooed on them,' he comments, apparently both pleased and mildly embarrassed. The music's accessibility means that Einaudi's fans aren't just listeners – they are often players as well. Scores are as highly anticipated as the album release. It's a model that has gone on to inspire dozens of others – Yiruma, Stephan Moccio and Joep Beving, to name a few, sell sheet music alongside records, supported by concerts of their own pieces. 'I am now one in a forest of pianists who work in this way,' agrees Einaudi. 'It was an interesting time when I first started, as there were still music shops and they didn't know where to place my music – is it classical or pop?'

There may be fewer music shops today, but labelling Einaudi's music remains as contentious as it was 20 years ago. 'Of course there are lots of people who don't like my music – and I respect their opinion,' he says politely. 'But some people put on the internet that I pretend to write classical music – what does that mean?'

American composer Nico Muhly is similarly baffled by the industry's insistence on categorisation. 'Reviewers and previewers get an enormous pass if they can describe a composer's work as being part of some sort of genre: post-minimalist, new complexity, Darmstadt School, chamber pop, whatever, or this new hellery, "Indie-Classical",' writes Muhly. And woe betide any composer, be it Muhly, Anna Meredith or Einaudi, who moves between those brackets. The problem is compounded when the artist is commercially successful. To millions of fans, Einaudi is currently the world's greatest pianist-composer. To most classical music critics, he is not.

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'I loved rock music, folk and classical – I honestly couldn't choose between them'

Einaudi was introduced to the piano by his mother, an accomplished musician. 'My grandfather – her father – was a conductor and composer. She was not professional but she taught me about Bach, Chopin and Schubert. And the Rolling Stones!' His paternal grandfather was Luigi Einaudi, the second president of Italy (1948-55), and his father was a notable publisher. The varied cultural diet had a big impact on the teenage Einaudi. 'I loved rock music, folk and classical – I honestly couldn't choose between these types of music as they all gave me something. I couldn't say "I love Chopin so I will throw away The Beatles".'

After graduating from Milan's Conservatory, he continued studying composition with Luciano Berio and was awarded a scholarship to the Tanglewood Music Festival. 'When I started to make my own music I wanted to bring all these influences into one career,' he reflects. 'I composed piano ballades that were in the tradition of classical composers – songs without words – but that used harmony from the rock-pop tradition. It wasn't a precise plan and I didn't know what would happen. I just played what I felt was right.'

The result was Einaudi's first solo album, *Le Onde* ('The Waves', 1996), inspired by Virginia Woolf's novel of the same name. Both this and *I Giorni* ('The Days', 2001) benefitted from air time on Classic FM and, at a time before streaming, Einaudi's music became some of the most frequently requested. In 2011, Radio 1 DJ Greg James described how he revised at university while listening to Einaudi and began playing the piano music on the show as part of the station's support for students. The title track from *I Giorni* was subsequently downloaded so many times that it entered the Official Singles

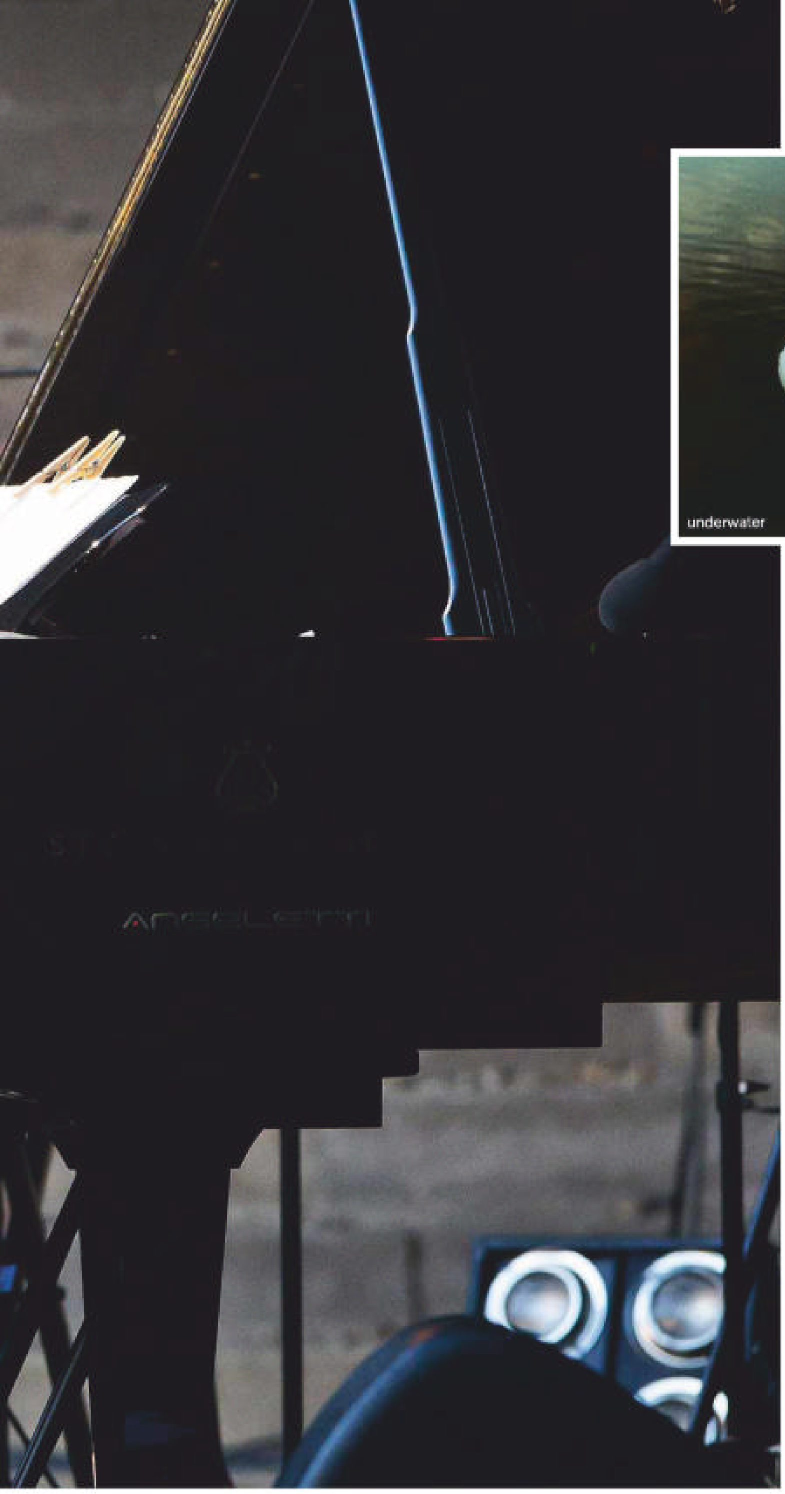


Chart Top 40 and the pianist was invited to perform in a special Radio 1 Piano Session.

Einaudi has continued to break new ground: *In a Time Lapse* (2013) became the first classical release to sell more digital downloads than physical copies. With the exception of Elton John, no other pianist is capable of selling out multiple dates for large venues on the same scale. When he comes to the UK in the spring, the 66 year-old will perform three nights at Eventim Apollo, Hammersmith and two at Alexandra Palace. His London residency will be interspersed with a performance at Manchester O2 Apollo, a date that has been rescheduled due to the pandemic.

The cover of Einaudi's latest album, *Underwater,* features a swan photographed by the composer himself. He increasingly turns to nature for inspiration. 'The more I live the more interested I am in having a relationship with nature rather than human beings,' he says, only half-jokingly. The 12 pieces on *Underwater* are all for solo piano, which has been 'prepared' by adding additional felt to the hammers.

A major appeal: (far left) Einaudi at the Waldbühne, Berlin in June 2017; (left) his new album, *Underwater*

'I was looking for a specific colour – it was a long process,' he says.

Like so many recent projects, *Underwater* was impacted by the 2020 lockdowns. The first entirely solo album Einaudi has released in 20 years, it was written during a period of extended isolation and has an improvisatory style. 'I wrote every day and began to edit and refine sections as you would,' he says, 'but I found that I was not adding to the music. The best pieces were musical breaths; once I'd exhaled, it was done.'

Underwater follows on from *Cinema,* a compilation of Einaudi's greatest screen-writing hits. To date, he has written for 80 film and TV projects, including *The Intouchables*, *Nomadland* and *The Water Diviner.* He is also the unlikely creative behind the soundtrack to *This Is England*, a gritty, powerful British film (and subsequent TV spin-off) about skinheads and white supremacist culture in the 1980s. In between snippets of The Specials and The Smiths are dark piano melodies that perfectly track the on-screen trauma. It's bleakness that goes beyond the comfortable tunes in, say, *Nightbook* or *Seven Days Walking,* and reveals another side to the composer.

What Einaudi's music means to so many listeners may be gathered through a glance at YouTube comments (he has over one million subscribers to his official YouTube channel). 'As someone who suffers from mental health issues, I find this music so helpful,' says one writer, 'This music literally saved my life,' notes another. 'Ludovico is the pianist who made me start piano lessons at 44,' adds someone else, while a jovial commentator puts 'how many people came here as they need to knock out an essay'. (That last one attracted over 2,000 likes.)

It might not be the most harmonically adventurous or technically complex, but Einaudi's pianism heals, soothes, engages and encourages. It comforts hectic minds and brings peace. 'There's an anxiety about having to be busy even if there's no reason for it,' he says. 'My music is a manifesto for slowing down.'

Einaudi's new album, Underwater, is released on Decca on 22 January

Talent to burn: Jon Lord (second left) and Deep Purple with Malcolm Arnold, 1969

A little classical learning

Six who chose to go popular

As a student of Berio and an acolyte of Stockhausen, Einaudi learned his craft from the very heart of the classical music world before deciding to turn his thoughts in a more populist direction. He is in good company in that respect.

Jon Lord, co-founder of heavy rock band Deep Purple, initially studied classical piano, and with *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* he began a fruitful relationship with Malcolm Arnold. Another highly talented classical pianist was a certain Reginald Dwight, who regularly skipped lessons at London's Royal Academy of Music but still passed his exams (though he also skipped his finals). As Elton John, he would emerge as one of rock's most successful pianists. At the Royal College of Music, meanwhile, Rick Wakeman, future keyboard player of Yes, was taking a similarly relaxed approach to his studies.

In the wider world of song-writing, Burt Bacharach (below), composer of such hit songs as 'Walk On By', 'Alfie' and 'Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head', studied under Darius Milhaud, whom he often cited as an important mentor; Quincy Jones studied in Paris under both Nadia Boulanger and Messiaen; and Vernon Duke, composer of the Broadway hit 'April in Paris', started life as Vladimir Dukelsky and studied composition under Glière.

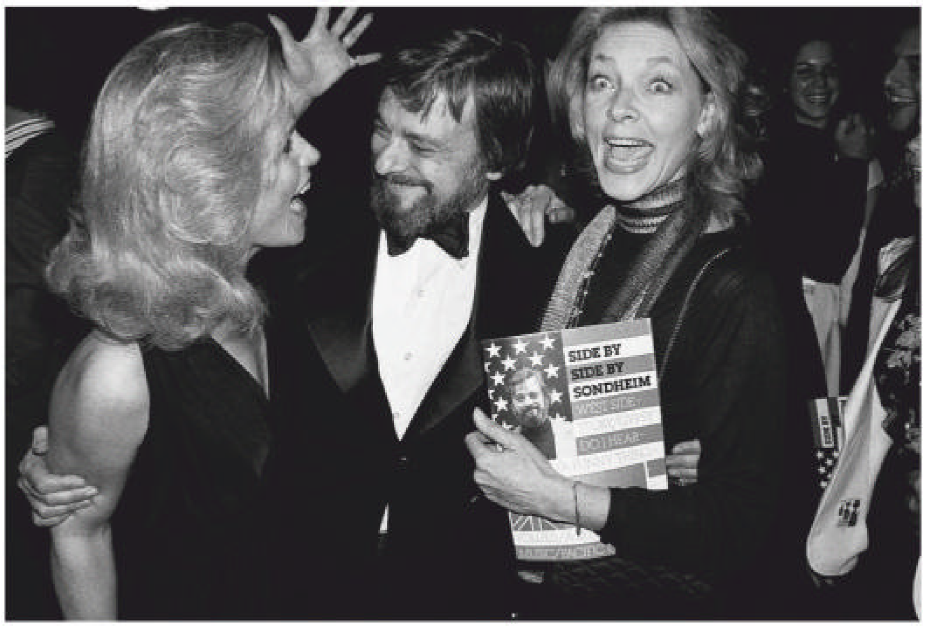
Musical man

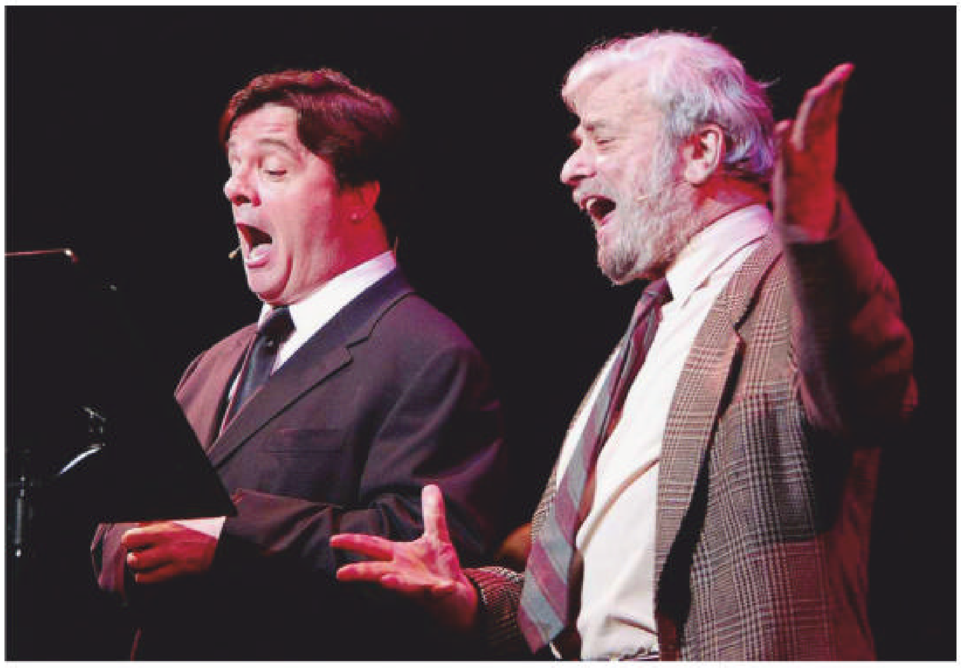
We pay tribute to the late Stephen Sondheim, a true giant of musical theatre, as both a lyricist and composer of over a dozen acclaimed works, famously beginning with *West Side Story*…

GETTY, ITV/SHUTTERSTOCK, COURTESY OF STEPHEN SONDHEIM

In good company: (clockwise from far left) Sondheim aged 16 with Oscar Hammerstein; receiving the Freedom of the City of London, 2018; recording *Into The Woods*, New York, 1987; rehearsing *West Side Story* with with Leonard Bernstein, Carol Lawrence (Maria) and women's chorus, 1957; President Obama awards him The Presidential Medal of Freedom at the White House, 2015; *Into the Woods* recording sessions with Bernadette Peters, 1987; with James Lapine, with whom he won the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award for *Sunday In The Park With George,* in 1985

A funny thing happened: (clockwise from below) with actresses Lee Remick (left) and Lauren Bacall following the opening of *Side by Side*, 1977; on *The Late Show* with Stephen Colbert, September 2021; singing with actor Nathan Lane, a long-term collaborator, at a benefit dinner in New York, 2004; with Elizabeth Taylor at a Wembley studio, 1976, recording songs for the film version of *A Little Night Music*; with actress Marti Stevens, who played Sarah in the London West End production of his musical *Company*, 1972; 45 years later, with West End *Company* cast members Rosalie Craig (left) and Patti LuPone





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Strauss | Rihm
Daniel Heide piano

Rewarded in numerous singing competitions, Sheva Tehoval considers experimentation and permanent research (particularly in chamber music) as the driving forces behind her artistic construction. As much attracted by Opera as Lied and contemporary music, she likes to vary the repertoires and gives importance to the search for alternative musical forms.

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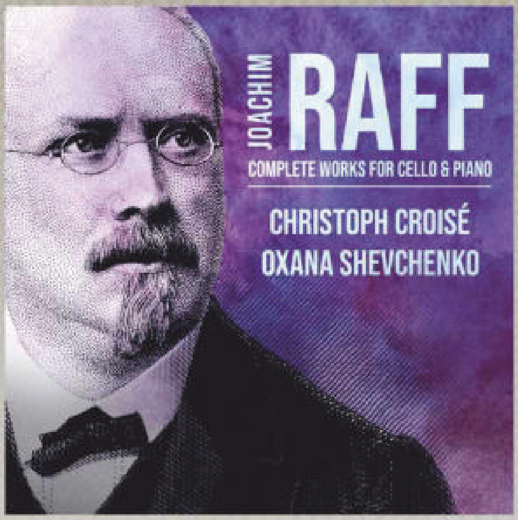

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The voice of the people

Not only lovers and tyrants, but also entire nations and peoples have been represented on the operatic stage – a tradition which is still very much alive, as Gavin Dixon reveals

Visit Prague for the opening night of the opera season and you might catch Smetana's *Libuše*. Visit Moscow, and it might be Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*. And in Warsaw, *Halka* by Moniuszko. But if you never visit the Czech Republic, Russia or Poland, you are unlikely to see any of them. In the increasingly cosmopolitan world of classical music, the 'national opera' is an unusual phenomenon – an artistic statement of independence, vernacular in both music and text.

Most national operas date from the late 19th century, a time when empires across Europe were losing their cultural authority and occupied nations were beginning to assert their identity. Opera proved an ideal medium, with words in the native language and music drawn from the country's folk songs and dances. By the early 20th century, the trend had spread beyond Europe, as far as Azerbaijan (*Leyli and Majnun*

Rallying cry: (clockwise) 'Va pensiero' from Verdi's *Nabucco* inspired nationalist sentiment across Italy; a scene from *A Life for the Tsar*; its composer, Glinka

by Uzeyir Hajibeyov) and even Argentina (*El Matrero* by Felipe Boero), ensuring local colour as opera traditions developed around the world.

Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* was the first national opera. The invasion by Napoleon's army was still fresh in Russian minds when the work premiered in St Petersburg in 1836. Glinka's story looks back to the early 17th century and a similar threat from Poland. Its hero, Ivan Susanin, foils a Polish plot to capture the young Russian Tsar, Mikhail. Susanin dies for his efforts, while Mikhail goes on to found the Romanov dynasty, who were still in power when the opera was performed. Glinka represents both the Polish and Russian sides with music from the two countries – but while Glinka invents lyrical and expressive folk melodies for the Russian characters, the Polish music is limited to impersonal national dances. The formula worked, with the Russian folk themes heightening the nationalistic sentiment. The *Slav'sya* theme, a hymn of praise sung in the Epilogue when the Tsar makes his triumphant entry into Moscow, became virtually a second national anthem in Russia later in the century.

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> "Even if it was a myth, the idea that Verdi's *Nabucco* chorus motivated a nationalist uprising inspired composers in other countries"

The patriotic chorus soon became a central element of the national opera. In 1841, Verdi made his big breakthrough with *Nabucco*. The story is about the exile of the Jews by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II. In Act III, the Israelites sing the chorus 'Va, pensiero' (Fly, my thoughts), a song of longing and nostalgia for their homeland. Milan, where the opera premiered, was then part of the Austrian Empire. By the end of the 1840s, the area was at war as the Italians sought independence from Vienna as part of the Italian unification movement. 'Va, pensiero' became associated with the struggle.

It was said that the chorus had been encored at the premiere (contravening Austrian laws), with the Italian audience immediately recognising a political message. It went on, so we are told, to become the rallying cry of the Risorgimento. In recent years, however, opera historian Roger Parker has shown that the encore at the premiere never happened, and that the link between the music and the uprising has been exaggerated. But Verdi himself was keen to make the connection, and his later reminiscences attributed the writing of *Nabucco* to rising nationalist sentiment.

Even if it was a myth, the idea of a stirring opera chorus motivating a nationalist uprising inspired composers in other countries. On the other side of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Budapest, Ferenc Erkel (1810-93) presented his opera *Hunyadi László* in 1844. The libretto is another historical allegory, set in the 1450s and following the military campaigns of János Hunyadi as he defends Hungary against the Ottoman Turks.

The soul of a nation: Libuše, heroine of the Czech nationalist opera by Smetana (below)

By the time of the 1848 uprisings, the choruses from *Hunyadi László* had become revolutionary anthems. Erkel became known as 'the father of Hungarian opera' and went on to write the country's national anthem. Croatia's national opera followed a similar pattern. *Nikola Šubić Zrinjski* by Ivan Zajc (1832-1914) is another story of brave defiance against marauding Turks, this time at the Siege of Siget in 1566. The climactic chorus, 'U boj, u boj!', was the triumph of the opera's 1876 premiere and has been a popular patriotic song in Croatia ever since.

But Zajc stuck close to the Italian traditions, so much so that he became known as 'the Croation Verdi'. In *Nikola Šubić Zrinjski*, he models the character of Mehmed, the Sultan's envoy, on Verdi's similarly conflicted figures of Simon Boccanegra and Otello. Musically, too, Italian influences are strong. Paradoxically, most nationalistic operas of the late 19th century drew heavily on established conventions. Where Zajc looks to Verdi, Glinka and Erkel base their operas on French models.

Later in the century, Wagner became equally pervasive. Smetana's *Libuše* (1871-2) is a 'festival opera' in the spirit of *Lohengrin*. Wagner's regal style proved an ideal model for a work written to celebrate a coronation (of Franz Josef as King of Bohemia – the coronation never happened) but then used for the ceremonial opening of the National Theatre in Prague.

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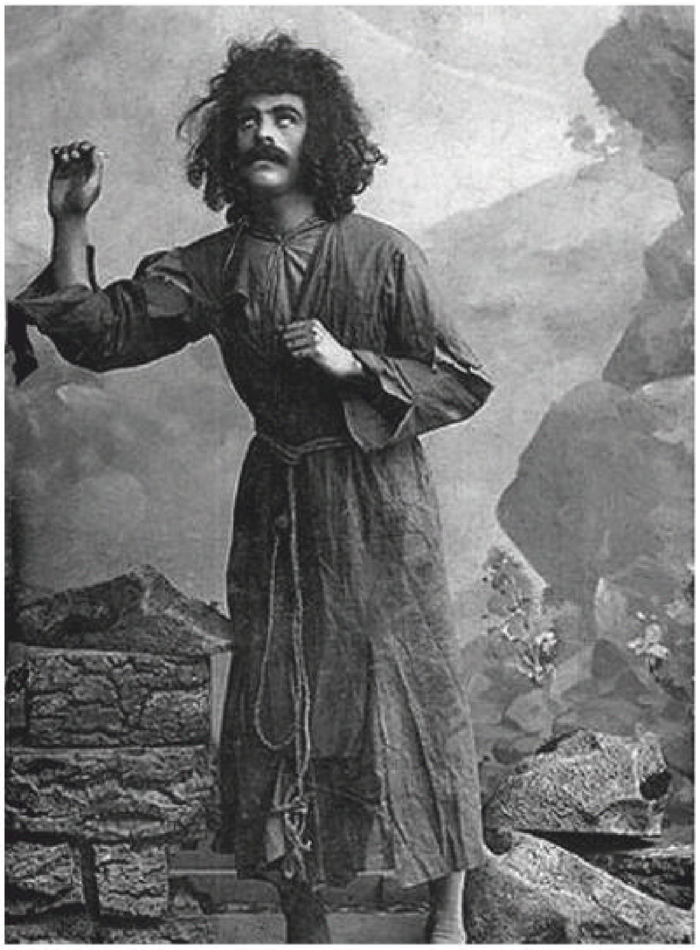
"Smetana's Libuše is closely aligned with the soul of her nation – indeed, she is the spiritual ancestor of the Czech people"

At the other end of the spectrum, the national opera of Azerbaijan, *Leyli and Majnun* (1908) by Uzeyir Hajibeyov (1885-1948), pays little heed to European models. Instead, it expands on ethnic traditions to create a large-scale work rooted in folk culture. Singing traditions of Azerbaijan form the basis of the music, which is then expanded to operatic scale through the addition of choral writing and orchestral accompaniment.

Leyli and Majnun is also unusual for setting a love story, based on an epic poem by the 16th-century Azerbaijani poet Muhammad Fuzuli, rather than one of political struggle. The most common plot device for national operas is a defining battle in the country's history. Yet the plots rarely focus on heroic military leaders. The role of everyday people in popular uprisings often proves more evocative. In *A Life for the Tsar*, the hero, Ivan Susanin, is a peasant from a rural village. Ukraine's national opera, *Zaporozhets za Dunayem* (1863) by Semen Hulak-Artemovsky (1813-73), follows a similar model. Again, the Ottoman Turks are the enemy, who according to the opera destroy an island fortress, a stronghold of the Ukrainian Cossacks. In actual fact, the fortress was destroyed in 1775 by order of the Russian Empress Catherine II, but Hulak-Artemovsky was writing for the St Petersburg stage, so had to tread carefully. His hero, Ivan Karas, is an old Cossack exiled to Turkish lands. *Zaporozhets za Dunayem* is unique among



From Azerbaijan to Albion: (left) Huseyngulu Sarabski as the first Majnun in Hajibeyov's *Leyli and Majnun*, 1908; (right) Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Etain in *The Immortal Hour*; (below right) English composer Rutland Boughton

national operas for being a comedy of manners, as Karas adjusts to life in the Ottoman Empire and to the eccentric behaviour of the Sultan.

Strong female characters provide another angle on national myths, with a heroic female lead representing the spirit of the nation. In *El Matrero* (1929), Felipe Boero (1884-1958) draws on the legendary status of the gaucho in Argentina. The story is set early in Argentina's history, on a remote ranch. Pontezuela is a female gaucho and also a singer, an embodiment of the Argentine spirit. She bursts onto the stage in the first act on horseback, pursuing a thief, the Matrero. A love triangle plays out, involving Pontezuela and the Matrero. The ending is tragic, but a vindication of Pontezuela's love and of the gaucho spirit.

Smetana's *Libuše* aligns the female lead even more closely with the soul of the nation. Indeed, she is a legendary ancestor of the Czech people. Two brothers are fighting over their deceased father's estate. Queen Libuše must resolve the matter. She marries a peasant farmer as part of complex negotiations to demonstrate her authority. The final act is the wedding celebration, but the remainder of the opera is a substantial monologue for Libuše in which she prophesies, through a series of visions, the main events in the history of the Czech people.

Each of these operas presents a self-image of a nation, specific to its time, a period of increasing national identity. But the challenges of the 20th century caused many national operas of the previous century to be reinterpreted. *Libuše* has remained popular in Prague ever since its 1881 premiere. Fairly recently, Supraphon issued a historic recording conducted by Václav Talich in Nazi-occupied Prague in 1939. At the end, the audience bursts into tumultuous applause and spontaneously sings the Czech national anthem. This was the last performance of *Libuše* before the Nazis imposed a strict ban.

Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* had a tortuous performance history through the period of Soviet rule. The authorities were keen to exploit the opera's nationalist sentiment, but its royalist character – let alone the title – was a problem. In 1924, the opera appeared in Odessa, recast as a Civil War drama under the title *For the Hammer and Sickle*, but the story was hopelessly garbled. Then, in 1939, a new version appeared, under the title *Ivan Susanin*. The poet Sergey Gorodetsky rewrote the text to remove all references to the Tsar, while managing to retain the essence of the narrative. The new version was a success, and Russia's national opera was transformed into the national opera of the Soviet Union.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in turn led to further changes, and not just to Glinka's opera. Ukraine's national opera, *Zaporozhets za Dunayem*, originally written for St Petersburg, had a Russian libretto. Now, in the face of heightened national sentiment in Ukraine, the text was translated into Ukrainian, and the work is invariably performed in that language today. Meanwhile, new operas of nationalist spirit are being written even in our own time. *Rumi* (2009), according to its composer Behzad Abdi, 'can be considered as the first national opera of Iran'. Designed for marionette performance, the opera is based on the life and writings of the 13th-century Persian poet Jalāl ad-Dīn Mohammad Rūmī. The format is familiar, with a plot about the threat of foreign invasion, this time by Mongolian armies, and music that mixes native traditions with Western conventions. But the Iranian colour is particularly vivid, with vocal writing based on the dastgāh scale system of traditional Persian music.

The circumstances of its composition reflect the more complex nature of many national identities today. Abdi himself is based in Kiev, and the opera's first recording was made with a Ukrainian choir and orchestra, albeit with a predominantly Iranian cast. Abdi has since written a second Persian-language opera, *Hafez* (2013), about the 14th-century poet. That it ends with Hafez being forced into exile seems fitting for an opera celebrating Iran's culture from afar.

No matter how the world appears to have changed in the last 100 years, opera's ability to express the aspirations and cultural heritage of a people clearly remains as vital as ever.

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Operatic shipwrecks

Britain misses the boat

'Why should we not have an opera in our own tongue, sung more or less by our own people, and produced at least in reasonable proportion by our own poets and composers?' This question was posed by *The Times*'s music critic with perhaps unwarranted optimism in 1879. Charles Stanford at least tried with no fewer than nine operas – including *Shamus O'Brien* (1895) which some historians suggest set a landmark in Irish opera. More esteemed today is Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers* (1904), her Cornish-set opera attaining its first English staging in 1909. Yet more successful was Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour*, based on a medieval Irish tale and first performed 1914 in Glastonbury at a festival created in emulation of Wagner's at Bayreuth. It was admired by both Smyth and Vaughan Williams, the latter then writing an even earthier folk-style English ballad opera, *Hugh the Drover*. But, saddled with a less-than-brilliant libretto, it flopped. Britten's coronation opera, *Gloriana* (1953), perhaps turned out to be England's best if belated answer to Glinka…

Northern Light

Stephen Pritchard visits Iceland, where a much loved orchestra and a local piano superstar have helped to bring in a golden era for classical music

When rehearsals are over for the day and there is still light in the soft Nordic sky, a handful of players from the Iceland Symphony Orchestra (ISO) will slip out of the magnificent Harpa concert hall, which looms like a glittering glass iceberg over Reykjavík's spectacular harbour, and jump into their jointly owned fishing boat moored nearby. For a nation that for centuries has gathered the major part of its income in the nets of its trawlers, it's perhaps only natural that its musicians should head out to sea to enjoy their share of the sharp arctic air and the brooding ocean's bounty.

It's one tiny example of just how tightly this orchestra is bound up in the life of this seafaring island. While today it draws musicians from all over the world, the majority are Icelanders, some the product of an education system that recognises music as a core subject from kindergarten onwards. Most of the larger towns have a separate music school where children can extend their learning after general music classes in school, while Reykjavík's University of the Arts offers more music study programmes than any other subject. It's a system that produces an acceptance that music is central to life – and it creates a willing, interested and educated audience for all manner of music.

Iceland is one of the least densely populated nations, with just over three inhabitants per square kilometre in a landmass that equals Wales and central and southern England combined. More than 65 per cent of it is forbidding, frozen tundra, a landscape of volcanoes, glaciers, geysers

Reykjavík on a roll: pianist Víkingur Ólafsson; (above) Damon Albarn and his new Icelandic album; (right) the Harpa concert hall

GETTY, ARI MAGG

and waterfalls, so it's hardly surprising that the entire island supports a population of only 366,000 – about the same as Stoke-on-Trent.

Despite these daunting physical obstacles, the orchestra's managing director, Lára Sóley Jóhannsdóttir, is determined that the ISO is seen as an integral part of the nation. 'We strive to be a truly national orchestra in what is a very scattered community,' she tells me. 'People can't necessarily get to Reykjavík to hear a concert, so we use streaming – which we set up long before the pandemic – along with TV and radio to reach those in remote places, and we tour. I grew up in a small fishing village in the north of Iceland and it was a wonderful moment when the orchestra came to our local sports hall.'

And, she says, audiences love *Our Classics*, a TV programme where people vote to hear pieces they want the orchestra to perform. 'We choose a theme – it might be Icelandic song, music for the theatre, opera arias – and they vote in their thousands. It's really popular and helps us build a lasting relationship with the population.' She also describes how the orchestra breaks out of the classical repertoire to play alongside some top names in Iceland's thriving pop music scene – Björk being an obvious example. But they don't always play an accompanying role: last summer the orchestra performed arrangements of numbers by 11 of Iceland's pop musicians and groups including Bríet, Cell7 and Daughters of Reykjavík, with the young artists playing within the orchestra. 'It brings in a whole new audience who might never have seen a symphony orchestra at work before,' says Jóhannsdóttir.

> "Iceland's education system produces an acceptance that music is central to life – and an interested audience"

In the depths of winter, when daylight is short, the ISO organises its Dark Music Days, which include new music by Iceland's emerging composers. 'We offer workshops where young people – who may not necessarily have a classical training – get to hear their music played.'

Iceland's liberal, questing approach to life and to music makes it an attractive place for international stars. For instance, Damon

The *Ice Land* sessions: (clockwise, from left) Clare College Choir recording with the Dmitri Ensemble; soprano Carolyn Sampson; conductor Graham Ross

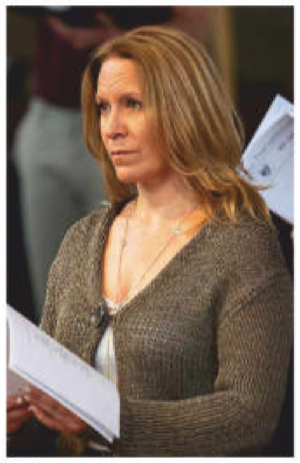
Albarn, of Blur and Gorillaz fame, has lived here for more than 20 years, and created his latest album here: entitled *The Nearer the Fountain, More Pure the Stream Flows,* it's inspired by the landscape of his adopted homeland and features Icelandic musicians. All of which helps to explain why, in the teeth of the Icelandic banking crisis of 2007, the government decided to step in and fund the completion of the half-built Harpa hall, ensuring the orchestra had a modern permanent home while also raising the status of Iceland and its music with a piece of 'statement' architecture. It opened in May 2011 with conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy and Iceland's superstar pianist, Víkingur Ólafsson.

Ten years on, the building is celebrating with an orchestral season featuring Ólafsson, who agreed to be artist-in-residence on condition that he could play piano concertos by three top living composers – Thomas Adès, John Adams and fellow Icelander Daníel Bjarnason – and each of them should conduct. They all accepted. Barbara Hannigan, Michael Sanderling and Osmo Vänskä are other starry-name conductors appearing in the 21/22 season, while Eva Ollikainen, the orchestra's artistic leader and chief conductor, will conduct Iceland Opera in performances of Wagner's *Die Walküre*.

Ólafsson became known to millions when he broadcast live from an empty Harpa hall for BBC Radio 4's *Front Row* over three months during the pandemic lockdown. His Deutsche Grammophon recordings of keyboard works by Philip Glass and JS Bach, his pairing of Debussy and Rameau and now his exploration of Mozart and his contemporaries have won him several awards, including *BBC Music Magazine*'s Recording of the Year in 2019.

I catch up with him backstage after he has played Adès's monumental concerto *In Seven Days,* which imagines the creation of the Earth as told in the *Book of Genesis*. 'Having the composer conduct was awesome,' he enthuses. 'He's like a great oak in the middle of the orchestra. It was marvellous, like playing the Ravel Concerto in G with Ravel himself conducting.'

Adès appears from his dressing room, receiving congratulations with charming modesty, and immediately greets an older man among the throng. Ólafsson explains that this is his father Ólafur, an architect and composer. 'I remember him introducing me to Thomas's music when I was about ten years old. He was an early fan, and encouraged me to explore his music further, and the music of Mark-Anthony Turnage, George Benjamin and Oliver Knussen.'



Iceland's choral landscape

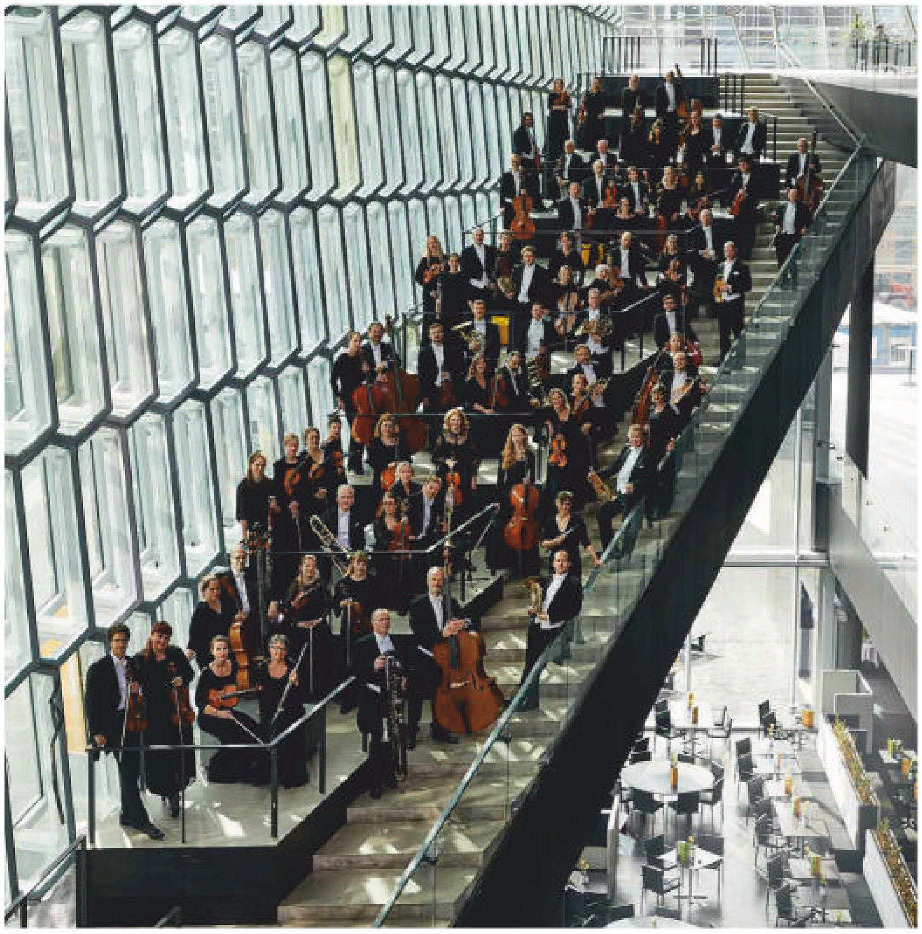
The unique sound of the Arctic

Visitors to Reykjavík can't exactly miss the Hallgrímskirkja, as it towers over the city. 'It is an extraordinary building,' says conductor Graham Ross, whose Choir of Clare College, Cambridge travelled there in September to sing a concert and a Sunday service. 'It's very stark in its beauty. Inside, it is extremely clean, with huge, plain white walls and thin pencil-like windows which give amazing light effects. And the acoustic is second-to-none.'

The choir's visit followed its recording (in London, with soprano Carolyn Sampson and the Dmitri Ensemble) of *Ice Land: The Eternal Music*, an album of works by Icelandic composers from the mid-20th century to the present. 'The music is incredibly beautiful and shares a soundworld that seems to connect remarkably to the amazing landscape from which it comes. A lot of it is slow moving, often underpinned by long, sustained bass notes, and you get this very sonorous effect – the music of Arvo Pärt is the closest I can compare it to, but in fact it is uniquely Icelandic. It is also very tonal and accessible.'

Ross first discovered a taste for Icelandic music when he was sent a score by Sigurður Sævarsson, one of the composers on the album. As well performing the work, Ross invited Sævarsson over to work with the choir and to introduce them to choral music by other Icelandic composers such as Anna Thorvaldsdottir (see p12). Sævarsson, says Ross, also assisted his singers with the local language: 'It was quite difficult learning Icelandic and we spent a lot of time on it. But then, if there was one good thing to come from the pandemic, it was that we had a lot of spare time on our hands!'

'Ice Land: The Eternal Music' is released this month (Harmonia Mundi)



Harpa players: Thomas Adès receives applause with Olafsson; (left) the Iceland Symphony Orchestra; (below) its MD, Lára Sóley Jóhannsdóttir

Plainly, Ólafsson is viewed as a precious asset in his homeland. When he pointed out that the piano at Harpa hall was showing its age, the government and Reykjavík city council sent him to Steinway in Hamburg to choose a new model. He gave it its first outing playing his Mozart and Contemporaries programme, filling the main Harpa auditorium on three consecutive nights.

Icelanders obviously love him. When he addresses the audience about his approach to Mozart and his contemporary composers Galuppi, CPE Bach, Cimarosa and Haydn, they hang on his every word. And he makes them laugh, particularly when introducing the new piano, which he names 'Sleipnir' – the magically fast, eight-legged horse that gallops through Norse cosmology. It's an appropriate name for a piano that has Ólafsson as its rider, one that has to keep up with his mercurial playing style and his cantering brain.

Ólafsson believes children are exposed to music in Iceland 'in a quite wonderful way', explaining that his son, aged two-and-a-half, joins all his classmates in twice-weekly music sessions, learning to sing and enjoy exploring music. 'Two weeks ago he came home and said he wanted to learn the clarinet. I didn't know he even knew what a clarinet was. I was thrilled – he wouldn't have to cope with the piano!'

He says his own musical upbringing predates him, as his pianist mother was five months pregnant with him when she played her solo recital for her final exams in Berlin. They moved back to Iceland and chose to buy a new Steinway piano rather than a flat. 'In those days, a new Steinway cost about the same as an apartment,

NICK RUTTER, ARI MAGG

" You need an orchestra that's willing to try new ideas – I'm so lucky to have that in the Iceland Symphony Orchestra "

but I think they got their priorities right. In a romantic sort of way they were saying that music is as important as housing. They rented a small basement apartment with a living room that could really only accommodate the piano.'

He learnt quickly, to the point that – he confesses – his school music teacher hated him. 'I was so arrogant. I thought I knew everything about the piano. At the age of eight I learned Mozart's K545 *Sonata facile*, the "simple" sonata that is actually among the most complicated. That was the first time I realised how much better I would have to become. Until that point I thought I knew how to play the piano. I haven't touched that piece until now.'

He's coy about revealing his next recording project but hints that Chopin is on his radar. In the meantime, he'll be heading to London for a residency at the Southbank and will continue to work with contemporary composers. Mark Simpson is currently writing him a concerto.

Back at Harpa, Lára Sóley Jóhannsdóttir, a longtime professional violinist, sits in her office with its sweeping sea views and recalls with affection her time in Cardiff, studying music management at the Royal Welsh Academy before joining the executive team at the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. After a year, she landed the top job at the ISO. That was in 2019. 'They were taking a risk with me,' she admits. 'It was a very testing time, as we were in lockdown. I think I've learned a lot about myself and the importance of always being optimistic. But you need an orchestra that's willing to try new ideas and I'm so lucky to have that.' It's all about teamwork: ask any fisherman.

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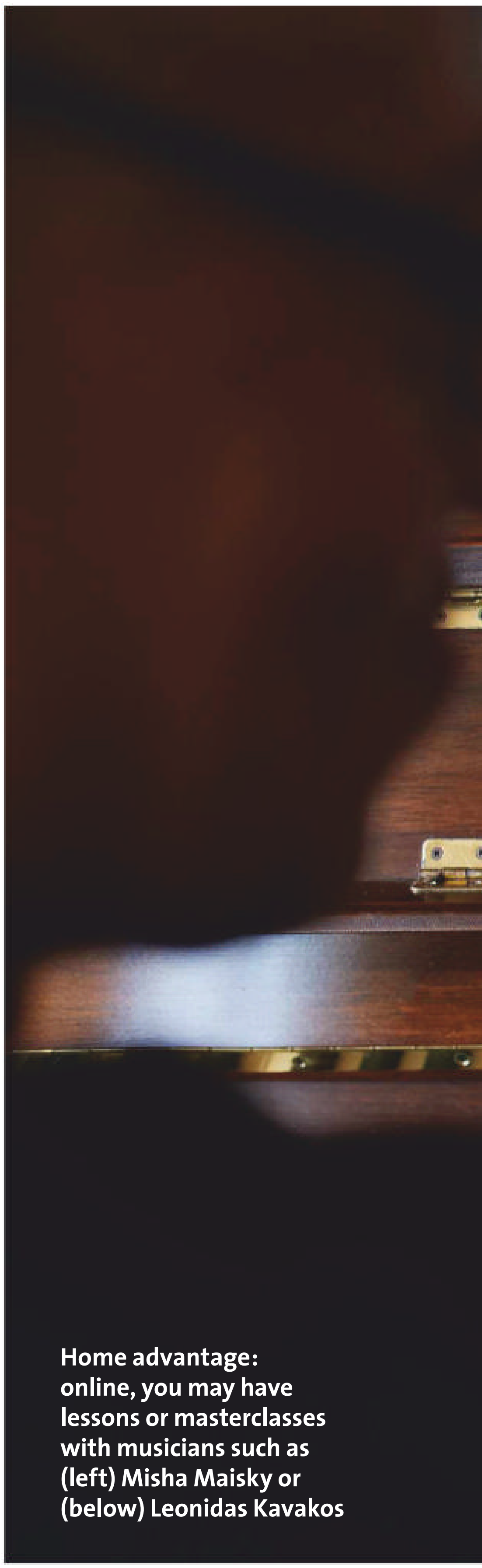


Distant pleasures

Whether composing or playing an instrument, learning and making music through your own computer screen has never been easier, as ***Rob Ainsley*** explains

Home advantage: online, you may have lessons or masterclasses with musicians such as (left) Misha Maisky or (below) Leonidas Kavakos

Among the things we've learned in the last two years that we knew already is that music-making at a distance, by video, is no comparison to being there. Performing together, or experiencing the sounds being created right in front of you, is still what it's all really about.

Music education, on the other hand, has been galvanised by computers and the internet. While face-to-face music-tutoring is still invaluable, video lessons can offer huge advantages of time, accessibility and cost. (Your ideal teacher might even live in a different country.)

Today, online music learning tools are not only clever and effective – and fun to use – but they also enable practice and development at any time to suit the user, at home or anywhere else, in any duration. They're often also cheap or free – even the most expensive of them will usually give you a free trial to see if the system works for you.

'Learning' can be painless and practice-free. For instance, you can visit YouTube and watch engaging, funny, insightful and addictive free videos that develop your appreciation and understanding of music, from Ravel to Radiohead. You may try YouTubers such as composer David Bruce, pianist David Bennett, rock guitarist Rick Beato and jazz-bassist Adam Neely.

But for more practical, hands-on stuff, the range of smart technology to assist music learners is staggering. Interactive apps can tell if your playing or singing exercises are accurate. Notation software can intelligently create parts from one chord. You can remove soloists from recordings to play

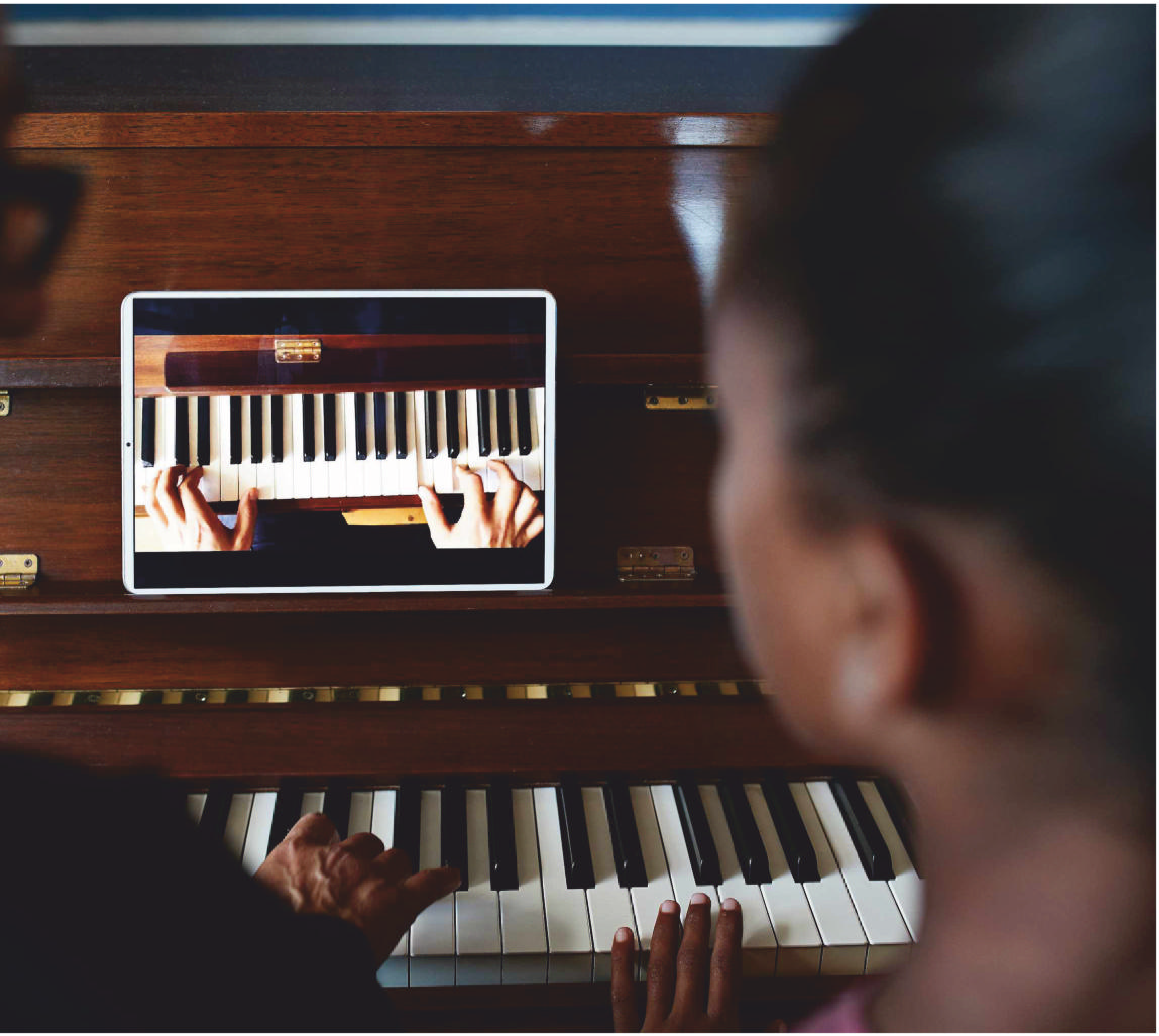
the part yourself. Your standard MIDI keyboard can become a staggeringly convincing Steinway. Cutting-edge tech enables quadriplegics to play music.

There are many more kinds of interactive online resources. Whether you're child or adult, student or teacher, beginner or expert, the breadth of tools to help you understand, enjoy and play music better is astounding. Here's our selection of some of the world's best music education and learning apps and websites out there.

Music Lessons and Masterclasses

The conventional music lesson model of traipsing across town doesn't suit everyone – transport problems, schedules, face-to-face nerves, arriving late and with fingers that don't thaw until the end. But there's an alternative: ArtistWorks (artistworks.com) offers the option of doing it from home with a video-based tutor-student relationship. You make and send off recordings suggested by the tutor, receiving a feedback video from them afterwards. It's particularly strong on guitar (of all styles). Your perfect teacher lives on another continent? No problem!

Meanwhile, iClassical Academy (iclassical-academy.com) has a wide selection of video masterclasses and courses to watch on core classical instruments and pieces. There



Getty, Hideki Shiozawa, Marco Borggreve

are insights from outstanding artists and teachers, such as cellist Misha Maisky and violinist Leonidas Kavakos, into major masterpieces like the Bach Solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas.

For Pianists

Keyboard skills are invaluable for any music lover, but many of us, even steady performers who can make nice sounds on one, aren't quite sure exactly how we're doing it. Pianote (pianote.com) is a series of online music lessons for keyboard that bridges the skills gap. Beginners can start at the very one-finger basics, while the more experienced can join at their level. It's particularly useful for the singer-songwriter pianist who wants to understand more about what they're doing in order to do it even better.

Enjoying the sound of your MIDI piano? No, we thought not. But here's a high-end piano project that reproduces the depth and individuality of top-range instruments. With Modartt (modartt.com), your digital keyboard can now become a Steinway, Bechstein, Blüthner and more. You're not simply playing recordings of notes: the results of each keypress are created on the fly, modelled by sophisticated algorithms to reproduce the physicality of the piano in question. Endlessly rewarding for accomplished pianists; other instruments (harpsichord, vibraphone etc) are available too.

> Your keyboard can reproduce a Steinway's sound and physicality

You are the soloist

Nomadplay (nomadplay.app) is essentially concert-quality karaoke: you can mute parts from 5,000 works and play along accompanied by the remaining parts on your own instrument at home – thus soloing in a Mozart piano concerto, for instance. The score scrolls along in front of you, and you can adjust tempos and volumes, even loop sections you need to practise. Artists are mainly French and repertoire ranges from Baroque to jazz, with new material added all the time. For accomplished players lacking ensemble rehearsal and performance opportunities, it's a boon – and huge fun.

All-ability tech

'Disability'? Technology is revolutionising what people can do rather than what they can't, and that applies as much to music-making as everything else. Eyeharp (eyeharp.org) is a project that enables people to play instruments by using their eye movements. Devised by a computer scientist for a musician friend paralysed in an accident,

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Online learning: guitarists are especially well catered for

EyeHarp is in development but well worth keeping... an eye on.

Children and schools

Start 'em early! Music Playtime (music-playtime.com) is a school resource for children aged 3–7 with a variety of activities and games that give them a real feel for music: singing, chanting, clapping and making all sorts of noises and sounds. Based in Britain, it's tailored to the school curriculum and gives children a great base for going on to study music more seriously.

Naxos Music Box (naxosmusicbox.com) uses the record label's vast recordings catalogue to enliven this wide-ranging learning site for children, parents and teachers. It's a comprehensive, colourful and gimmick-free introduction to classical music's instruments, composers and works, with plenty of traditional substance behind the family-friendly interface.

It's remarkable how learning music theory turns from being a slog to being fun once you make it interactive on a computer. ABRSM Digital Resources (gb.abrsm.org/en/exam-support/apps-and-practice-tools/) offers a wide range of tools, covering theory, practice, playing along and reading scores, from Grade I upwards. All conventional instruments – strings, woodwind, voice – are covered, and there are helpful more general background articles on (for example) handling nerves.

'Music composition' might suggest dry academic exercises to some, or three-chord-songwriting to others. But in this world of everything being a video in need of a soundtrack, creating new music has never been more in demand – or more enjoyable. I Can Compose (icancompose.com) is a set of teaching modules for composition students and teachers around GCSE and A level. Familiar names, plus recognisable and lively music examples, mean you're guaranteed to find inspiration, and there's the technical background to help turn the musical ideas into reality.

Familiar names mean you're guaranteed to find inspiration

Ear Training

Just as language-learning apps are astoundingly sophisticated – and effective – nowadays, so is ear-training software. EarMaster 7 (earmaster.com) guides the innocent ear through the language of rhythm, intervals and harmony interactively – you can play or sing the exercises back to it, and it knows when you're doing it right. It takes you from simple major thirds and 4/4 up to the most subtle detailed jazz harmony and swing: like being fluent in a language, you can get to understand and reproduce most music on one hearing.

Notation software and scores

Music notation software these days needs to offer far more than simply score creation. The best can save composers and arrangers hours of slog with intelligent features. For example, having laid out the instrumentation for the first chord, you only have to enter subsequent chord names for the programme to work out (correctly!) which notes to insert in which part. This and countless other smart features make Steinberg's Dorico (steinberg.net/dorico/) a serious consideration for anyone who needs to produce musical scores quickly, accurately and easily.

Visit any musician's place, meanwhile, and it won't be long before you trip over a pile of scores. Newzik (newzik.com) is an array of brilliant score-handling tools. For instance, you can digitise them, annotate and organise them, and then access them on the cloud, having them page-turn as you read from your tablet while playing. But that's only to start with as there's much more on offer, including a remarkably effective score-reader which can turn the dots into a decent MIDI file, with all instruments and parts separated. For hands-on, score-reading musicians, this is wonderfully time-saving stuff. No more tripping over...

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MUSICAL DESTINATIONS

Stratford-upon-Avon England

The Warwickshire town famous for a certain local playwright is also full of noises, sounds and sweet airs, as *Claire Jackson* discovers

A glimpse of Avon: the Royal Shakespeare Company's home; (below) David Le Page, artistic director of Orchestra of the Swan

A man scatters grain along the riverbank, where a bevy of swans are gathered. They crane elegant white necks before hoovering up the offering. The birds are an intrinsic part of Stratford-upon-Avon: their image adorns postcards, waterside shops advertise specialist food and the Royal Shakespeare Company's local was originally named The Black Swan – it was rechristened The Dirty Duck by American GIs stationed by the river during World War II. In the early 1990s, a group of musicians decided to name their newly formed ensemble after the feathery friends. Orchestra of the Swan (OotS) is the prominent resident chamber group, presenting around 45 concerts a year – in its home town and across the Midlands.

Just beyond the river sits Stratford Playhouse. It's a multi-purpose centre that, alongside music, hosts everything from comedy to crafts. OotS performs here regularly – although recently its concerts have taken an unexpected twist. Violinist David Le Page, who has performed with OotS for two decades, recently became the orchestra's artistic director. The ensemble has since taken an increasingly creative approach, recording and performing mixtape-styled programmes that bring

Going swimmingly: the Orchestra of the Swan in performance

together the likes of Schubert and The Smiths. *Timelapse* (Signum Classics), which paired works by Errollyn Wallen with Radiohead, was a surprise lockdown hit – it has been streamed over two million times since its release in early 2020. Keen to replicate the success, OotS has just released *Labyrinths*, a similarly diverse collection featuring music by Nico Muhly, Britten and new arrangements by Le Page.

'I didn't want to do orchestral cover versions; I've tried to write original material that connects with the songs,' explains Le Page as he prepares to go on stage at the *Labyrinths* launch event. 'We're hoping to offer a way in for new audiences.'

The mixtape project doesn't replace OotS's 'traditional' concerts: Michael Collins is principal conductor for the 2021/22 season and recently played Copland's Clarinet Concerto. Tonight, Le Page is joined by Trish Clowes, the orchestra's associate artist. OotS performs *Bounce*, Clowes's pointillist work featuring the composer herself on tenor saxophone. Le Page praises Clowes's work for 'pushing the orchestra out of their comfort zone' – particularly when it comes to improvisation. The ensemble is a keen supporter of new music (to date, the OotS has premiered 70 works by composers including Errollyn Wallen, Roxanna Panufnik and Huw Watkins) and has just commissioned Clowes to write a saxophone concerto, which will receive its first performance in April at the Playhouse.

Clowes is no stranger to Stratford-upon-Avon. The saxophonist and her trio My Iris performed at King Edward VI School (notable alumnus: William Shakespeare) for Radio 3's Sounds of Shakespeare event in 2016. Musical collisions with England's most famous writer (see Local hero, right) are inevitable in the town; as well as a host of informal gigs across the Shakespearean-themed outlets, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) stagings often feature an orchestra – frequently comprising OotS players. The RSC, whose vast red-brick home enjoys a prime spot right by the River Avon, has an illustrious history as a commissioner of new scores, notably recruiting Ralph Vaughan Williams to

Musical collisions with England's most famous writer are inevitable in the town

compose music for *Richard II*. Ted Watson has just arranged a new version of Walton's luxurious score for *Henry V*, translating triple woodwind, multiple harps and an enormous brass section to a more practical 11-strong ensemble. The music will be performed at the RSC as part of the new staging this year and will also be recorded by OotS.

In recent years, the RSC has recorded its scores alongside some of the speeches – the stirring text from *Coriolanus* (2017), for instance, can be heard interspersed with sounds by Mira Calix, while the 2018 production of *Troilus and Cressida* was scored by Evelyn Glennie. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust holds records from the RSC's music department and its predecessors – including 400 scores by significant composers including Lennox Berkeley, Alan Rawsthorne, Jonathan Dove, Howard Blake and many more.

It is hoped that further performances and recordings of these pieces will take place over the next few years, says Bruce O'Neil, RSC Head of Music and OotS guest conductor. We are speaking in one of the RSC's three permanent theatres, where the stage is set for an ensemble rehearsal. My concentration flickers as I spy an intriguing headdress with pretzel-shaped ears and an array of stuffed elephant toys. These, O'Neil explains, are related to the RSC's current musical, *The Magician's Elephant*, a charming new adaptation of Kate DiCamillo's novel.

We leave the cosy theatre to allow the musicians to work their magic. And the name of this 426-seat space? The Swan.

Further info: Orchestra of the Swan: orchestraoftheswan.org; Royal Shakespeare Company: rsc.org.uk

Local hero

William Shakespeare

As the celebrated playwright's birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon is an important literary location. But the bard wasn't just an advocate for words: Professor Christopher Wilson at the University of Birmingham has identified more than 2,000 references to music, over 400 separate musical terms and around 100 songs within Shakespeare's plays. The variety and range of references reveal the importance of music in Elizabethan England. In *Twelfth Night*, the Duke calls: 'If music be the food of love, play on; Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting, The appetite may sicken, and so die.'

GETTY, NATASHA BIDGOOD

John Luther Adams

Rebecca Franks describes how the American composer found his distinct musical style by abandoning all for the wilderness of Alaska

ILLUSTRATION: MATT HERRING

In 2014, *Become Ocean* won the Pulitzer Prize for music. A vast and immersive symphonic seascape, it is a modern-day answer to Debussy's *La mer*. And there's a clue in the title. This isn't music that so much describes the ocean, but music that somehow, metaphorically, *is* the ocean. Beneath its glittering surface are powerful undercurrents. Its notes behave like shifting water; its structure is built of surging waves. While meticulously constructed as a musical work, at its heart is also a serious environmental message. In a note on the score to *Become Ocean*, its composer wrote: 'Life on this earth first emerged from the sea. As the polar ice melts and sea level rises, we humans find ourselves facing the prospect that once again we may quite literally become ocean.'

This landmark work was, for many, their first taste of John Luther Adams. For a long time, the American composer had been overshadowed by the 'other' John Adams – so much so that he included 'Luther' to his published name to avoid confusion. Everything changed with *Become Ocean*. After the Pulitzer, the premiere recording won a Grammy in 2015, and when pop star Taylor Swift heard the piece, she donated $50,000 to the Seattle Symphony, its commissioner. Alex Ross of *The New Yorker* declared Adams 'one of the most original musical thinkers of the new century', while snippets of *Become Ocean* turned up in the soundtrack to the wilderness film, *The Revenant*. Sometimes a piece of art finds its moment in time, and Adams's blend of art and environmentalism couldn't have felt more apt or urgent.

It had been a long time in the making. Adams has often spoken of making the 'wrong' decisions in his life, yet it's this series of unexpected turns that helped him find his voice. Born in Mississippi in 1953, he had an itinerant childhood and an eclectic musical upbringing. He played in several rock bands as a teenager and devoured music by The Beatles, Frank Zappa and Edgar Varèse. After stumbling across an LP of *Piece for Four Pianos* in a record shop, he fell in love with Morton Feldman's music. 'It took me to a place that Pink Floyd couldn't take me,' he once told *BBC Music Magazine*. 'I knew then I wanted to be a composer.'

> 'I realised that I might be able to discover a new kind of music from all that fire and ice'

Despite dropping out from high school, Adams's musical talent earned him a place at the Californian Institute of the Arts, where he studied with James Tenney and Leonard Stein. After graduating in 1973, he became involved in environmental activism, and headed north. Far north. To Alaska. When he first visited the state in 1975, a lost 22 year-old in an alien and challenging environment, he immediately felt at home. 'I realised there was a possibility that I might be able to discover a new kind of music there,' he later said; 'music that was in some way drawn directly from all that space and silence, all that snow and wind, that fire and ice.'

From 1978, Adams spent the next 36 years in Alaska. For a whole decade, he lived in an isolated cabin in a boreal,

Composer of the Week is broadcast on Radio 3 at 12pm, Monday to Friday. Programmes in February are:
31 January – 4 February Elgar
7-11 February CPE Bach
14-18 February Edward Gregson/Alan Bush
21-25 February Respighi
28 February – 4 March Clementi

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Adams's style

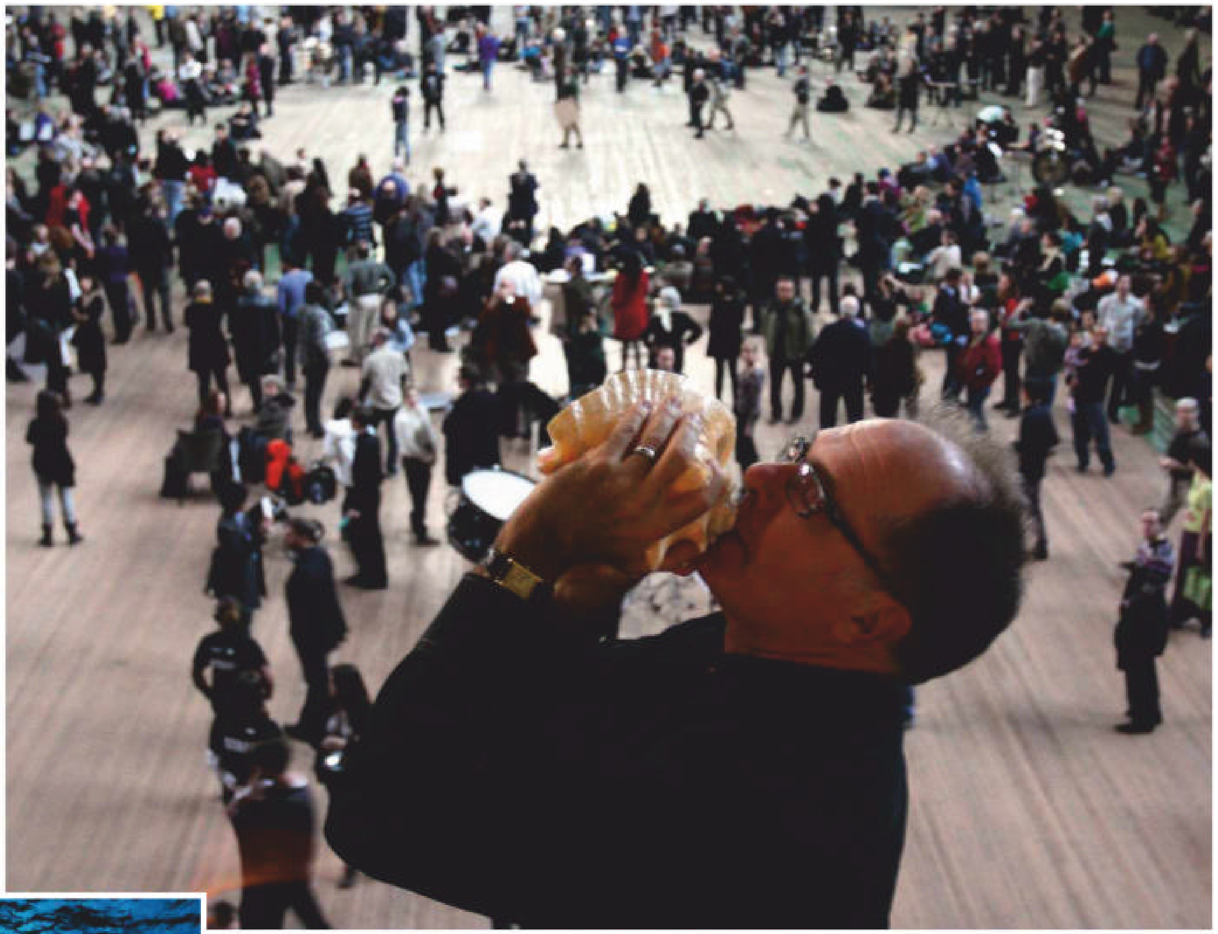
Birdsong This is a constant thread in Adams's work, culminating in *Ten Thousand Birds*, an open-ended collection of flexible pieces. He is not so much interested in literal representations of birds, but how we listen to them, what we hear and what is lost in translation.

Time Sometimes it can feel as if not much is happening in Adams's music, as if you were watching a cloud drift by. Yet his music demands that the listener slows down and pays attention, and then it feels that everything is happening. Subtle surface nuances are twinned with longer-term shifts in the music.

Space Adams creates expansive spaces in his music. Sometimes that's through quite literal means: choosing a large outdoor location or using huge casts of performers. Sometimes it's more of an illusion, created through moments of stillness in the music, for instance.

Drumming A rock drummer when he was growing up, while in Alaska Adams got to know traditional Iñupiat drumming and became fascinated by the shifting rhythms and metres. His pieces often feature intense and impactful drumming sequences.

Striking music: (right) Steven Schick and more than 70 fellow percussionists performing *Inuksuit* at Park Avenue Armory, New York, 2011; (below) Schick, with John Luther Adams in silhouette, after performing 'Roar', part of *The Mathematics Of Resonant Bodies*



black spruce forest near Fairbanks, in bitingly cold temperatures. He chopped wood, carried water and lost himself literally and metaphorically in the wild landscape. He later reflected that those were ten 'lost' years when it came to his music, as the lifestyle was too gruelling to allow time for creativity. Nor was he trying to be a full-time composer. Continuing his environmental activism, Adams fought to protect Alaska's natural heritage, campaigning against the dams, roads, mines and oil drilling that would damage its wildlife and landscape.

Still, he hadn't forsaken music. Adams was a percussionist with the Fairbanks Symphony and Arctic Chamber orchestras from 1982-89, immersing himself in western symphonic repertoire. He attended Inuit festivals and learned about their powerful musical traditions: drumming, singing, dancing. And then there was birdsong. He had first become fascinated with it after hearing a wood thrush in the hardwood forests of Georgia, US. Years of paying attention to birds and writing down their calls resulted in *songbirdsongs* (1980), a collection for two piccolos and three percussionists. Unlike Messiaen, Adams wasn't interested in accurately transcribing birdsong, but sought instead to evoke its melodies and rhythms. The result was both fresh and mystical.

GETTY

Other pieces he wrote during these years include *Night Peace* (1976), *Strange Birds Passing* (1983) and *Forest Without Leaves* (1984). His emerging musical voice started to attract attention, and by the spring of 1989 he found himself at a crossroads: art or activism? One lifetime wasn't enough to succeed at both. Adams decided to rededicate himself entirely to music. Someone else could take care of the politics. As he threw himself into life as a composer, he came to believe that 'fundamentally, art matters more than politics'.

Adams's music draws on rhythms and cycles of the natural world

New pieces began to appear, written slowly, in solitude. *Earth and the Great Weather* of 1993 was a major achievement, bearing all the hallmarks of his style. Subtitled 'A Sonic Geography of the Arctic' and described as 'a journey through the physical, cultural and spiritual landscapes of the Arctic, in music, language and sound,' the 90-minute piece is utterly shaped by his Alaskan experience. Scored for soprano, alto, tenor and bass soloists, spoken voices, three drum quartets, strings and electronics, it sets eight 'Arctic Litanies' – texts which name plants, weather and seasons in English, Latin, and two indigenous Alaskan languages, Inupiaq and Gwich'in. The naming of things became an important tool that Adams would later revisit, and surely adds to the elemental power of this music.

Adams refined his craft over the coming years. He explored further the idea of sonic geography, or of music having its own topography, as an alternative to the musical pictorialism of, say, the chirruping birds and dramatic storms of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony. As a result, his music often evokes a feeling of vast space, something conductor JoAnn Falletta once described as a 'natural geographical cathedral in sound'. Time also seems to take on a different quality in his music, drawing on rhythms and cycles of the natural world as much as any western classical notion of metre and tempo. Just as spending time outdoors in nature encourages people to slow down and pay attention, Adams's music requires a different sort of listening.

Works like the hypnotic *Canticles of the Holy Wind* (2013) and the sunset-inspired *The Light Within* (2007) bring the outdoors into the concert hall. At a certain point, Adams found himself wondering if he could do the opposite: take music

back into the outdoors. *Inuksuit* was the impressive upshot, named after the standing-stone way-markers used by the Inuit in the Arctic and written for anything between nine and 99 percussionists (and optional piccolos). The audience can move around during its performance, changing perspective in a way that's impossible in a concert hall. Music, listener and landscape all become part of the art. Described by *The New York Times* as 'the ultimate environmental piece', Inuksuit opened a new avenue in Adams's work. *In the Name of the Earth* (2018), for instance, was even more ambitious, with 800 singers gathered for its outdoor premiere in New York.

And what happened after *Become Ocean*? It became the second part of, as Adams admits, 'a trilogy that I never set out to write'. *Become River* (2010) was the first instalment, a smaller-scale work for chamber orchestra; *Become Desert* (2017) was the third. This was on an even larger scale than *Become Ocean*, with an orchestra and choir divided into five ensembles surrounding the audience – 'Close your eyes and listen to the singing of the light,' instructs the score. It also echoes Adams's own life. He left Alaska, and moved between the deserts in Mexico, Chile and the southwestern US, while also re-joining the urban jungle with a flat in New York. Yet his work has lost none of its connection to nature; in fact, with the impact of climate change ever more visible, his message has become more vital.

By nature, Adams is a deep thinker. And there's a sense now that, at 68, he is reflecting on the life he has already lived, and what he will do with what he has left. In 2020, he published his memoir *Silences So Deep: Music, Solitude, Alaska*. He is also working on what will be his final piece for symphony orchestra, as he revealed in a recent interview published on the website of American bird conservation society Audubon. In *Vespers of the Anthropocene*, Adams sets the 'Litanies of the Sixth Extinction', a roll call of 192 endangered and extinct species – of which humans are the last. Scored for choir and orchestra, the piece intends to sound an alarm bell. 'It's a lot to hang on music, but it's all I've got,' he told Audubon. If any composer can wake listeners up to the awe and majesty of the planet, it's John Luther Adams.

JOHN L ADAMS Life & Times

1953

LIFE: Born in Meridian, Mississippi, the son of an accountant working for AT&T, John Luther Adams moves with his family to various parts of the US during his childhood.

TIMES: President Truman announces the detonation of ***'Ivy Mike'***, the world's first hydrogen bomb, raising worldwide fears of nuclear war.

1971

LIFE: He moves to Los Angeles to study at the California Institute of the Arts; composer ***James Tenney*** becomes an important mentor.

TIMES: In LA, Charles Manson and three of his cult 'family' members are found guilty of murdering seven people in 1969, including the pregnant actress Sharon Tate.

1978

LIFE: He moves to central Alaska, a state he first visited in 1975 as an environmental activist. He lives for ten years in a rudimentary cabin in the woods outside Fairbanks.

TIMES: ***Grease***, starring John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John, is a huge success as it opens in cinemas across the world, and becomes the highest-grossing musical film up to this point.

1993

LIFE: He composes ***Earth and the Great Weather***, a 90-minute work with texts in English, Iñupiaq, Gwich'in and Latin that explores the 'sonic geography' of the Arctic.

TIMES: Former Wimbledon and US Open champion Arthur Ashe dies of complications related to HIV, thought to have been contracted years earlier during a blood transfusion.

2014

LIFE: *Become Ocean* wins the Pulitzer Prize for Music, and he and his wife Cynthia ('Cindy') leave Alaska, settling initially in New York.

TIMES: The United Nations International Court of Justice orders Japan's Antarctic whaling programme, found to be commercial rather than scientific, to cease.

2006

LIFE: In recognition of his sound and light installation *The Place Where You Go to Listen* and other Alaskan-inspired works, he is named a United States Artists Fellow.

TIMES: Wikileaks, founded by the Australian ***Julian Assange***, registers its domain name, so establishing the internet activist website. It publishes its first media leak in December.

George Frideric Handel

Acis and Galatea

Created for a wealthy earl's estate, Handel's Ovid-inspired pastoral brilliantly brings its subjects to life; ***Paul Riley*** seeks the best versions

The composer

When Handel wrote *Acis and Galatea*, the 33-year-old composer was beginning to forge a significant reputation in England. Born in Halle, Germany, in 1685, he moved to Italy in his early 20s, where he wrote *Dixit Dominus* as well as the operas *Rodrigo* and *Agrippina*. Appointed Kapellmeister to George, Elector of Hanover – the future George I of Great Britain and Ireland – in 1710, Handel travelled to England where, two years later, he decided to settle. His *Water Music*, written for George I, was premiered on the Thames in 1717, the year he became house composer at Cannons, Middlesex.

BBC RADIO 3 **Building a Library** is broadcast on Radio 3 at 9.30am each Saturday as part of *Record Review*. A highlights podcast is available on BBC Sounds.

The work

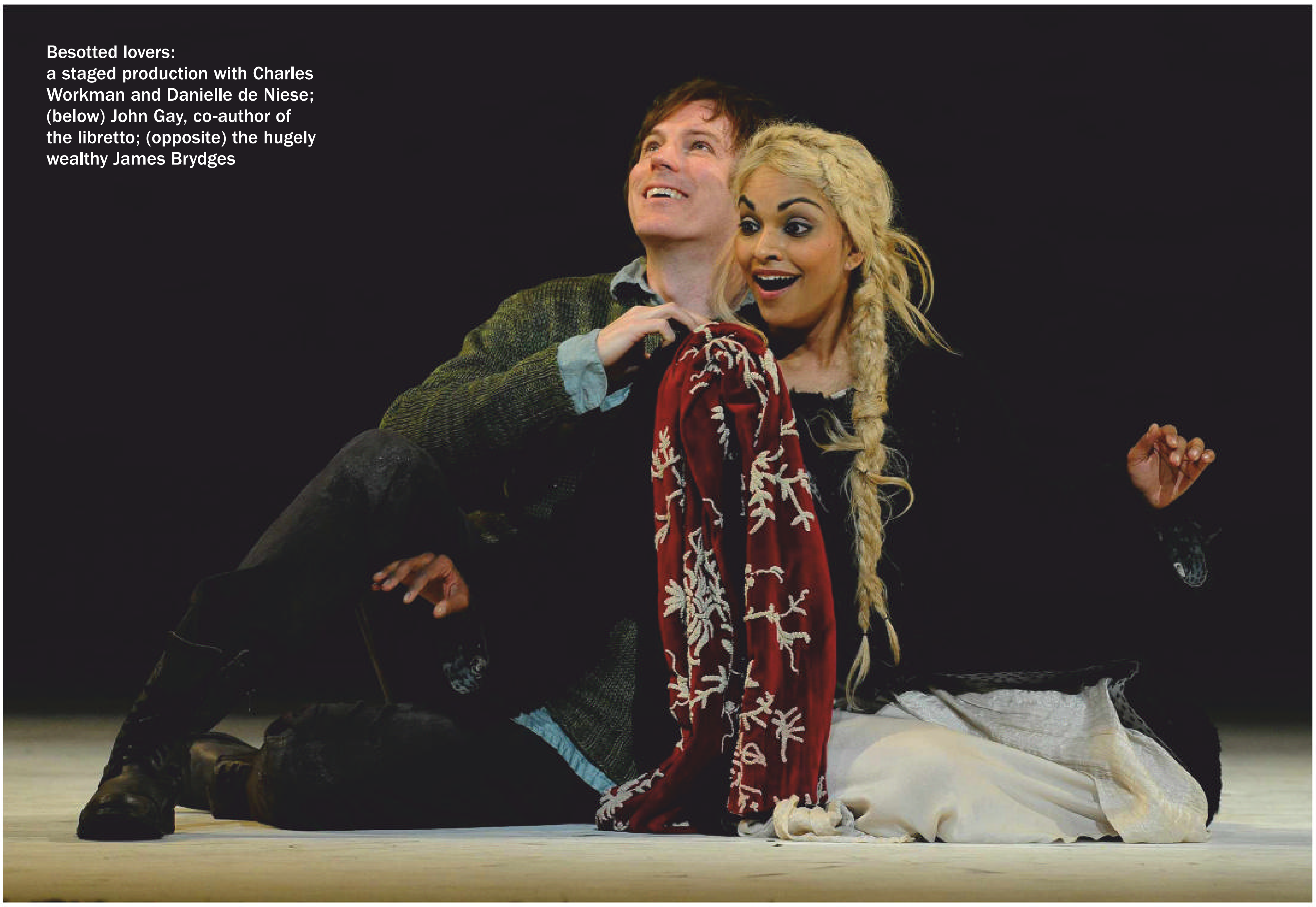
According to the music historian Charles Burney, who knew him well, 'Handel's look was somewhat heavy and sour, but when he did smile it was his sire the sun bursting out of a black cloud'. Across Handel's music, is there anything to rival the sunburst that is Part I of *Acis and Galatea*, composed in 1718 for the pleasure-loving house guests of James Brydges, Earl of Carnarvon, and soon to be Duke of Chandos? Brydges had acquired an eye-watering fortune (by nefarious means) and was now remodelling his out-of-London estate at Cannons, Middlesex, where the Parish Church (for which Handel composed the *Chandos Anthems*) had been given an Italianate makeover, and the house itself restyled as a Palladian villa complete with terraced gardens boasting ostriches, flamingos, storks, macaws and, above all, a fountain. Leafy Edgware today might struggle to resemble the paradise envisaged by Brydges, but if ever a place deserved its gilding of bespoke musical Arcadia it was surely Cannons.

With Italian opera in abeyance and feuding between King George I and the Prince of Wales (the future George II) making it politic for Handel to keep out of the crossfire, the prospect of tackling the story of Acis and Galatea away from London must have appealed. And in fact he'd already dipped into Ovid's *Metamorphoses* a decade earlier, concocting *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* as part of the Neapolitan wedding celebrations for the Duke of Alvito.

It's a simple tale, simply told by Ovid – as, indeed, it is by Handel, but with what sophistication! The shepherd Acis is in love with the sea-nymph Galatea, and for the whole of Part I they are deliriously happy or moping when apart. Cue a big black cloud. The cyclops Polyphemus is also smitten with Galatea and, provoked by jealousy, crushes Acis under a boulder. Happily, sea nymphs have special powers and Acis is granted immortality, transformed by Galatea into a gushing fountain. To turn Ovid's mythical tale into an English libretto, Handel was fortunate to secure a cabinet of literary talents headed by John Gay – born in the same year as Handel, incidentally – and Alexander Pope.

How to categorise the piece? Variously called a serenata, pastoral, masque, cantata, oratorio and opera, perhaps its least problematic designation is the endearingly

For the whole of Part I, Acis and Galatea are deliriously happy or moping when apart



Besotted lovers: a staged production with Charles Workman and Danielle de Niese; (below) John Gay, co-author of the libretto; (opposite) the hugely wealthy James Brydges

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straightforward 'Mr Handel's Music'. And just as the *Chandos Anthems* had, of necessity, been fashioned for a somewhat unusual line-up thanks to the vagaries of Brydges's musical retinue, so too *Acis*. At Handel's disposal were five singers (doubling up as soloists and chorus), a scant handful of strings, two oboes (doubling as recorders) and a harpsichord – though by the time of the performance a double bass seems to have been procured, plus a sopranino recorder, whose *obligato* contrast with Polyphemus's bass produces a Shostakovich-like juxtaposition.

Beyond those forces, we know little about that first performance. It would be satisfying to think that it took place appropriately al fresco and proximate to Brydges's handsome water feature. In any event, 'Mr Handel's Music' surfaced again for a London benefit in 1731 and was given twice the following year by Thomas Arne (not the composer of 'Rule, Britannia!', but his father of that name, according to some scholars) – provoking Handel into a supersized riposte conflating parts of the earlier Italian serenata and the Cannons piece into a bilingual three-acts extravaganza.

Finally, in 1739 he reverted to the purely English *Acis*, adding a concluding chorus to the 'Happy we!' duet that ends Part I on such a high – and embossed it with a carillon for extra alluring bling. Published in 1743, *Acis* went on to muster more than 100 performances over Handel's lifetime, and Mozart subsequently brought the scoring 'up-to-date' for Viennese tastes. In the 1820s, Mendelssohn – in a spot of plea-bargaining to facilitate his revival of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* with the Berlin Singakademie – expanded the orchestration even further and included an ophicleide-like *corno inglese di basso* to shadow the hapless Polyphemus.

Though seemingly unpretentious, *Acis and Galatea* was a major milestone in Handel's output. A seasoned composer of Italian operas, he was now unwittingly honing his skills in setting English on an extended scale that would stand him in good stead when Italian opera finally yielded to English oratorio. And the constraints imposed by the unusual forces avaiable at Cannons challenged his imagination with profoundly liberating results. Acis, Galatea and even Polyphemus are not just creatures of myth, but arguably real people with real and powerful emotions. If we don't thrill to 'the pleasure of the plains' or feel something of Polyphemus's pain even as we laugh at his impossible ambition, we're missing the essence of the humanity with which Handel imbues every note. Far from merely a modest country house entertainment, it's actually one of his most perfectly achieved and quietly audacious creations.

Turn the page to discover our recommended recordings of Handel's Acis and Galatea

Winning *Acis*: Christian Curnyn's lively account trumps all others

The best recording

Curnyn's lovers snatch the crown

Christian Curnyn *(director)*
Early Opera Company
Chandos CHSA 0404(2)

Although Handel tinkered with the score, there's something about the directness and intimacy of the pared-back original that blossoms so beguilingly when appropriate forces are deployed. Adrian Boult recorded it with the London Symphony Orchestra, Joan Sutherland and Peter Pears in the mid 1960s, and as the taste for something lighter grew, so chamber orchestras such as Neville Marriner's Academy of St Martin in the Fields stepped up to the plate. But that same year, (1978), John Eliot Gardiner and the period instruments of his newly formed English Baroque Soloists offered a historically informed alternative, and since then *Acis* has never looked back – revelling in the fruity sound of baroque oboes, the piercing piquancy of the sopranino recorder and a style of singing that that engages directly with one of the finest librettos Handel ever set.

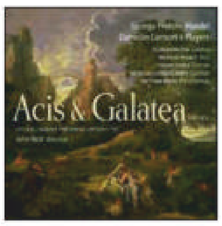
Christian Curnyn's is a performance that leaves you savouring every note

Latest into the fray is Christian Curnyn's Early Opera Company, and against strong competition this 2017 account snatches the crown. Not entirely surprisingly so – their Handelian credentials have long been rehearsed on stage and in the recording studio, and Curnyn 'speaks Handel' with a penetrating fluency and naturalness. The scale is essentially that of the Cannons first performance, but with six rather than four violins, the addition of a theorbo to enrich the continuo, and – why wouldn't you! – the addition of the later choral afterthought to the duet 'Happy we!', here crackling with joy unconfined.

Curnyn's pacing is lively – in the Sinfonia, whose chortling oboes hang on for dear life, some might say 'excitable' – and there isn't a weak link in the casting. Lucy Crowe was born to sing Galatea: melismas float; kittenish sensuality propels 'Happy we!'; numb simplicity seals the vulnerability of 'Must I my Acis still bemoan'; and, swaddled amid murmuring recorders, her final aria ravishes. Allan

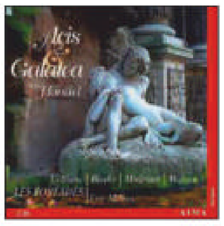
Three other great recordings

William Christie (director)
Christie and Les Arts Florissants have the theatre coursing through their veins, and any interventions in this 1999 account such as the spectacularly long choral trill in the first chorus reprise or a few ear-tickling Gallicisms never feel like gratuitous attention-seeking. The result is an eminently urbane reading based on a tweaked version of the original score (substituting a light-on-her-feet Patricia Petibon for the tenor Damon and succumbing to the later choral ending of Part I). It's crowned by Sophie Daneman's supple, coquettish Galatea. (*Erato 2564 659887*)



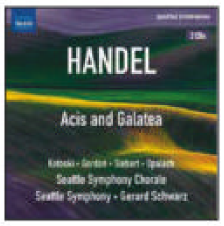
John Butt (director)
If bearding *Acis and Galatea* in its 1718 Cannons lair is a consideration, no one dots the 'i's and crosses the 't's more thoroughly than the Dunedin Consort in 2008. But John Butt's scholarly insight always serves instinctive, vivid music-making. Tempos are often spacious and 'The flock shall leave the mountains' unfolds at a deliberate pace that allows Polyphemus's flailing interjections maximum impact – Matthew Brook quite the most nuanced cyclops on disc. Susan Hamilton's Galatea

is a nymph of liquid loveliness. An illuminating antidote to more viscerally charged readings. (*Linn CKD319*)



Eric Milnes (director) Les Boréades de Montréal's 2004 set exudes a lithe freshness and attention to instrumental detail that more than compensates for any quibbles. The opening chorus is enlivened with rustic drone effects, and the pin-sharp chirruping of 'Hush, ye pretty warbling choir' almost leaves Suzie LeBlanc's appealing Galatea in the shade. Mark Bleeke's Acis sometimes betrays signs of strain, but his first aria has French snap, crackle and pop aplenty. Milnes's pacing, throughout, is spot on. (*Atma ACD 22302*)

And one to avoid...



Gerald Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra (with piccolo replacing sopranino recorder) laid down this anachronistic 1991 account a good decade after John Eliot Gardiner's period instrument recording. It starts well with a lively Sinfonia, but elsewhere tempos often invite lethargy, recitatives are drawn out and heavy string bass line can lumber. Dawn Kotoski sounds a rather well-upholstered Galatea, but David Gordon makes a decent fist of Acis.

Clayton's impetuous, hot-headed Acis similarly compels, and 'Love sounds the alarm' marches to battle with a momentum that encourages a certain swaggering braggadocio. But tender lyricism is never wanting, and how affectingly he dies, Curnyn nurturing an almost Purcellian pathos at the end of the ensuing chorus. Neal Davies brings stentorian heft and presence to Polyphemus's rages and gaucheries (though Matthew Brook in John Butt's recording (see above) fleshes him out with even more lurid relish). Curnyn's, in short, is a performance that leaves you savouring every note... and then some!

Pastoral pleasures: Bridget Cunningham conducts *Colin and Phoebe* by (below) Thomas Arne

GETTY, VICTORIA CADISCH

Continue the journey...

We suggest five works to explore after Handel's Acis and Galatea...

Another pastoral work by **Handel**, the ode *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, is considered by many his most overlooked masterpiece. Two complementary poems by Milton, depicting L'Allegro ('the cheerful man') and Il Penseroso ('The melancholy man'), are rounded off by Charles Jennens (who compiled the texts for Handel's *Messiah*) with Il Moderato, who balances those extremes. (**The King's Consort/Robert King** *Hyperion CDA 67283/4*).

Late in the previous century, **John Blow**, a musician of the Royal Court whose work Handel is known to have studied, composed *Venus and Adonis*. Subtitled 'A masque for the entertainment of the king', this is another allegory on love with a pastoral setting in which the male lead is killed. (**Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment/René Jacobs** *Harmonia Mundi HMG 501684*).

The graceful, French courtly style of Blow's music shows the influence of **Lully**, who composed his Ovid-inspired *Acis et Galatée* in 1686. Describing his last completed opera as a 'pastorale héroïque', Lully considered its three acts quite a modest effort compared to his usual five-act operas. Still, it is a rather longer work than Handel's

but is particularly affecting in its portrayal of Galatea. (**Musiciens du Louvre/Minkowski** *Archiv 453 4972*).

> Lully's *Acis et Galatée* is particularly affecting in its portrayal of Galatea

The legend lived on in **Haydn**'s earliest surviving stage work. *Acide* (1763) shows the Austrian composer – no mean singer himself – already writing splendidly effective music. To the line-up of characters familiar from Handel's work is added Glauce, Galatea's confidante, and the sea-nymph Tetide. Alas, much of the score was destroyed in a fire at the Eszterháza palace in 1779; what survives includes a pompous number for Polifemo and an accompanied recitative for the grief-stricken Galatea punctuated with vengeful outbursts. (**Haydn Sinfonietta Wien/Manfred Huss** *BIS BIS-SACD-1812*).

Whether it was **Thomas Arne** or his father who annoyed Handel by staging a pirated version of *Acis*, it seems appropriate to include Arne's modest contribution to the pastoral genre. His love duet *Colin and Phoebe* was a hit when performed at London's Vauxhall Gardens – according to Charles Burney, the duet 'was constantly encored every night for more than three months, successively'. (**London Early Opera/Bridget Cunningham** *Signum SIGCD 428*).

Reviews

110 CDs, Books & DVDs rated by expert critics

Welcome

There's something invigorating about witnessing the burgeoning talent of rising stars, and this month's pages offer an embarrassment of riches when it comes to bright young things. I was delighted to see Canadian pianist Bruce Liu's International Chopin Competition recording receive a glowing report this month, and he's not the only prize-winning artist you can hear. Our Recording of the Month (see right) finds French pianist Alexandre Kantorow performing spellbinding Brahms, while violinists Sonoko Miriam Welde and Francisco Fullana present hearty albums of Vaughan Willams and Vivaldi. Then there's soprano Sheva Tehoval with a fine programme of French song, and baritone Nicholas Mogg singing works by Carl Loewe.
Michael Beek *Reviews editor*

This month's critics

John Allison, Nicholas Anderson, Terry Blain, Kate Bolton-Porciatti, Geoff Brown, Michael Church, Oliver Condy, Christopher Cook, Martin Cotton, Christopher Dingle, Misha Donat, Jessica Duchen, Rebecca Franks, George Hall, Malcolm Hayes, Julian Haylock, Claire Jackson, Berta Joncus, Erik Levi, Natasha Loges, Andrew McGregor, David Nice, Roger Nichols, Bayan Northcott, Steph Power, Anthony Pryer, Paul Riley, Jan Smaczny, Michael Tanner, Roger Thomas, Sarah Urwin Jones, Alexandra Wilson

KEY TO STAR RATINGS

★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★	Excellent
★★★	Good
★★	Disappointing
★	Poor

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Prepare to be totally spellbound by Brahms

Erik Levi is left breathless by pianist Alexandre Kantorow's lithe and lyrical performance of the epic Sonata No. 3

Brahms

Ballades, Op. 10; Piano Sonata No. 3 in F minor; Chaconne – from Partita No. 2 by JS Bach
Alexandre Kantorow (piano)
BIS BIS-2600 (CD/SACD)
85:16 mins

Tchaikovsky Competition winner Alexandre Kantorow has already demonstrated his profound empathy for Brahms in a previous release for BIS which features insightful performances of the B minor Rhapsody and Second Piano Sonata. Here, he tackles the more technically and musically demanding Third Sonata, a work which has inspired several distinguished recordings from master pianists such as the late Nelson Freire on Decca and Murray Perahia on Sony. Yet Kantorow fully matches these formidable rivals, presenting an absorbing interpretation that revels in the quasi-symphonic dimensions of Brahms's piano writing and allows the musical argument to unfold with the maximum degree of spaciousness. Above all, there's a tremendous depth and beauty of tone to Kantorow's playing, amply supported by a wonderfully warm recording.

Kantorow's approach to the Sonata is romantic and impassioned, making the most of its stark contrasts in mood. This is already evident in the huge dynamic range that characterises his conception of the opening movement in which tortured and sometimes ferocious writing is frequently juxtaposed with passages that are wistful and resigned in character. Yet even in those passages where the sheer density of textures can so easily sound overloaded, such as the opening of the development section, there is never a feeling of strain in the playing.

Arches of sound: Alexandre Kantorow's interpretation of Brahms is compelling

The rest of the Sonata is no less impressive. Kantorow imbues the more reflective sections of the *Andante* with tender lyricism, the opening of the trio section of the *Scherzo* sounds radiantly beautiful, and the death-ridden angst and desolation of the Intermezzo is suitably chilling. At the opposite end of the dynamic spectrum, the *Scherzo* is volatile and explosive, and in the Finale, Kantorow sustains the tension superbly, which brings the Sonata to a suitably exciting and defiant conclusion.

A similarly epic quality is brought to bear on the Four Ballades, which are delivered here with poetic sensibility and a captivating sense of atmosphere. In particular, Kantorow's propensity for emphasising the lowest registers of the keyboard brings a deeply unsettling resonance to these evocative miniatures. Nowhere is this more effectively drawn than in the *sotto voce* closing passage

The Ballades are delivered with poetry and a captivating sense of atmosphere

to the First Ballade, where the left-hand staccato off-beat triplets sound particularly spooky. Such imaginative control of texture makes me long to hear how Kantorow might tackle Brahms's later more intimate and emotionally elusive piano output.

Yet perhaps the most compelling playing of all comes with Kantorow's perceptive account of the arrangement for left hand of the Bach Chaconne from the Second Violin Partita, a much more austere transcription than the flamboyant version for two hands by Busoni. Once again, the richness and fluidity of the playing compel admiration, and the way Kantorow paces the large-scale architecture of the music is mesmerising. A particularly special moment comes near to the end with the return to the darker mood of the opening. The way in which the young French pianist negotiates this transition in tonality, from major to minor, is quite simply spellbinding.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

MICHEL KURST, SASHA GUSOV

An interview with Alexandre Kantorow

Why are you drawn to Brahms?
His is some of the first music I really connected to, so naturally I come back to it. He has the intellectual side of the Classical period, where he looks up to Beethoven, and at the same time he is still part of the Romantic period. He has a lot of dignity in how he shows his emotions, but there are moments where he lets go. I think it's a good balance between the heart and the head.

And that is reflected in the programme for this album?
You find his dignity mostly in the mature pieces, but in his youth you have this very ambitious, explorative side. In the Sonata he treats the piano like an orchestra, expanding the volume and the tones the piano can carry; there are actually some impressionistic moments and some very strange dissonances. It's this part of his music I wanted to showcase.

What are the challenges of the Third Sonata for you?
Well, it's a five-movement work and the movements are very connected to each other, so you have to feel the length and keep the structure intact, as well as the forward momentum. Also it's about the sound that you produce, because there are a lot of powerful moments. You really have to balance the moments where it's extreme and demands an explosion of sound. It's hard to not be carried away immediately from the first bars. There are a lot of emotional moments in the music, too, a lot of lyricism and a lot of drama. So finding this balance where you need to make it sentimental, but not too sugary, is also a challenge. It is exhausting, but it's exhilarating.

Orchestral

ORCHESTRAL CHOICE

Lean and lyrical Bruckner from Linz

The orchestra's latest entry in its cycle is an experience, says ***Michael Tanner***

Bruckner

Symphony No. 8 (1890 version)
Linz Bruckner Orchestra/
Markus Poschner
Capriccio C 8081 76:16 mins

The rate at which recordings of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony are issued is astonishing. Even more remarkable is that many of them are issued as part of a complete cycle. This one is part of the Linz Bruckner Symphony Orchestra's cycle under Markus Poschner, a gifted artist but one who has so far made less impact on the musical world than I would have expected from this recording. His early teachers included such un-Brucknerian characters as Roger Norrington, but Poschner seems to have emerged unharmed.

Perhaps the comparative leanness of sound he obtains from the LBSO has to do with his training; or perhaps that is the result of the relatively medium size of the orchestra. At any rate, this recording might have been made as a rebuttal of the inert Vienna Philharmonic recording under Thielemann, with which it contrasts in most ways. Bruckner should sound as unlike Richard Strauss as possible: despite the huge forces he employs, and the conspicuous use of the harp at key points, especially the climax of the third movement, there should be an element of austerity.

Played and conducted like this, the unity of the work is clearer

Without being notably faster than the majority of contemporary accounts, this performance is much more flexible, less cumbersome, more of an experience and less of a monument. I found it refreshing, especially in the last two movements, which between them can last almost an hour and make you forget the thrust and energy of the first two, and indeed of this supreme work as a whole. Played and conducted like this, the work's unity becomes much clearer, and it emerges, at least for me, as the greatest of all symphonies, though in the wrong hands it becomes a weariness for the spirit.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

A flexible approach: Markus Poschner's reading is refreshing

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Brahms

Symphony No. 1; Violin Concerto
Stéphanie-Marie Degand (violin); Le Cercle de l'Harmonie/Jérémie Rhorer
NoMadMusic NMM101
82:23 mins (2 discs)

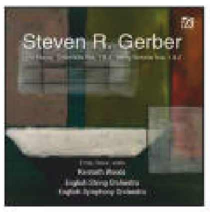
Jérémie Rhorer and period instrument orchestra Le Cercle de l'Harmonie are likely to ruffle many feathers with this release. In Brahms's First Symphony, instead of the measured and more Romantically charged interpretations of a Karajan, Abbado or Blomstedt, in the outer movements the composer's dynamic and almost Beethovenian control of rhythm is emphasised. The smaller instrumental forces create a much more transparent, fleet-of-foot orchestral texture than is possible with a modern symphony orchestra. All these aspects of the performance are compelling and illuminating, especially when Brahms's writing is at its most intense and highly-charged. But in the more reflective lyrical passages, both in the outer movements and the *Andante sostenuto*, there are times when a slight relaxation of tempo and a more fluid approach to rubato could provide necessary contrast and prevent the performance as a whole sounding unyielding.

In stark contrast, the opening tutti to the first movement of the Violin Concerto is far more relaxed and expressive, Rhorer no doubt responding to its expansive and sunnier character. There is an excellent rapport between soloist Stéphanie-Marie Degand and the orchestra, with impeccable ensemble and some wonderfully mellifluous wind playing in the slow movement. Degand negotiates all the tricky passage work with tremendous aplomb. But the double-stop passages in the first movement sound a little brutal to my ears and despite the high-octane appropriately paprika-laden energy of the Finale, her approach is a tad relentless and unsmiling. *Erik Levi*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Gerber

Sinfoniettas Nos 1 & 2; Lyric Pieces*†; String Sinfonias Nos 1 & 2†
*Emily Davis (violin); †English String Orchestra; English Symphony Orchestra/Kenneth Woods
Nimbus NI 6423 73:07 mins



The American composer Steven R Gerber died of cancer in 2015, aged 66, leaving behind a Trust able to promote his music and support other sympathetic ventures. Hence this album: one of the results of a two-year partnership with the English Symphony Orchestra and their

American conductor, Kenneth Woods. Like many composers of his generation, Gerber initially dedicated himself to total serialism, only to later embrace tonality, expressive dissonance and a frowning dark mood often recalling 20th century Russians. All that is exactly Woods's cup of tea, though the recording quality doesn't work in the music's favour; likewise some of the Trust's commissioned arrangements of works originally written for much smaller forces.

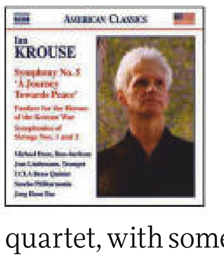
Only the *Lyric Pieces*, in fact, are heard in their original guise: these make delightful listening, partly thanks to Emily Davis's lively and characterful violin. String Sinfonia No. 2, arranged by Adrian Williams from Gerber's String Quartet No. 6 (a memorial for his late wife), appeals through its lyric and rhythmic intensity, and the composer's intermittent skill in exploiting the variation form. Williams is far less successful turning that quartet's predecessor into Sinfonietta No. 2, burdened with clogging, fussy instrumentation of often unwieldy material. The ears flinch as well at the awkward mish-mash of Sinfonietta No. 1, Daron Hagen's piano-free conversion of Gerber's Piano Quintet.

Throughout, the performances are of a high level; not the case with some of the music, and certainly not with the recording, seemingly captured at a leisure centre's swimming pool. *Geoff Brown*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★

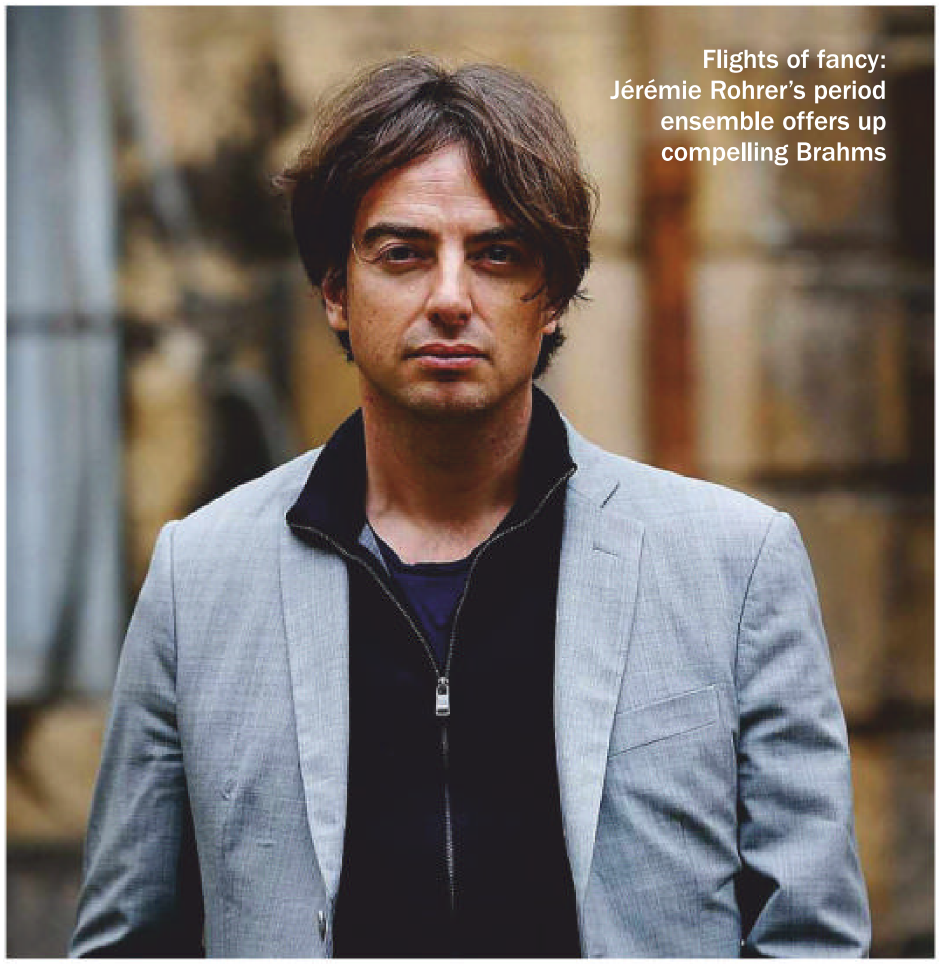
Ian Krouse

Symphony No. 5 'A Journey Towards Peace'*; Fanfare for the Heroes of the Korean War; Symphonies of Strings Nos 1& 2
*Michael Dean (bass-baritone), *Jens Lindemann (trumpet); *UCLA Gluck Brass Quintet; Seocho Philharmonia/ Jong Hoon Bae
***Naxos** 8.559907 69:23 mins*



California-based Ian Krouse (b1956) is perhaps best known for his development of the guitar quartet, with some 11 composed to date. However his output is far wider, and this orchestral album reflects an important aspect of his work as a public composer with a powerfully eclectic commemorative voice.

REINHARD WINKLER, CAROLINE DOUTRE



Flights of fancy: Jérémie Rohrer's period ensemble offers up compelling Brahms

The central two works were co-commissioned by conductor Jong Hoon Bae's Seocho Philharmonia for the 70th anniversary of the Korean War. The short, stirring *Fanfare for the Heroes of the Korean War* was premiered by them at a memorial event in South Korea in 2021. Here it becomes a kind of coda to a 2017 version of Krouse's Symphony No. 5, which itself brings together three standalone works composed between 1998 and 2006.

Intended to underscore the 'very special relationship between the United States and the Republic of Korea', the Fifth Symphony too contains bright fanfares and a muscular patriotism couched in Copland-esque sweeping colours, performed with spirit by trumpet soloist Jens Lindemann and the orchestra.

But the mood is just as often ambivalent. While the second movement 'Of the Apocalypse' utilises a Korean melody in a dark foreboding that reflects the real-world complexity of the Symphony's subtitle, *A Journey Towards Peace*, the final movement setting of Whitman's 'On the Beach at Night' – supply sung by Michael Dean – also ends ominously.

Less convincingly performed but with inventive textures, the Symphonies of Strings Nos 1 and 2 (1993) are based respectively on an old Hasidic song and popular Renaissance theme. *Steph Power*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Lowell Liebermann

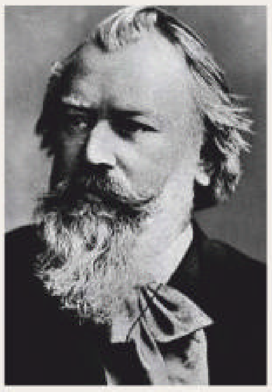
Frankenstein
San Francisco Ballet Orchestra/ Martin West
***Reference Recordings** RR-148*
119:28 mins (2 discs)

When British choreographer Liam Scarlett received the commission for *Frankenstein*, a co-production between the Royal Ballet and San Francisco Ballet, choosing a composer was easy. American composer Lowell Liebermann's chamber music is highly respected (his Flute Sonata is considered among the best) and Scarlett had already set three of his piano works (*Gargoyles*, *Euphotic* and *Viscera*) to dance. Sadly, the period setting for this version of Mary Shelley's gruesome classic appears to have diminished Liebermann's usual prowess – the score to Scarlett's first full-length ballet is more gauche than gothic.

This recording was captured at a live performance at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco in 2018, following on from the ballet's premiere at Covent Garden in 2016. Like all good composers, Liebermann can write to a brief (he once wrote a piano duet on behalf of Steinway for the marriage of the pianists Lang Lang and Gina Alice Redlinger) and naturally a stage work sets certain parameters. But the slushy neo-Romantic style fails to capture the terror of, say, the anatomy theatre, nor the deathly final act (transferred by Scarlett from the Arctic to the mansion).

Frankenstein was due to be performed by the Royal Danish Ballet in the spring of 2022, but was cancelled amid complaints and press reports about Scarlett's alleged misconduct during his tenure at the Royal Ballet. Though an independent investigation found no evidence of criminal activity, Scarlett resigned from the Royal Ballet and committed suicide in 2021, aged 35. San Francisco Ballet dedicates this recording to Scarlett, 'whose creative genius was an inspiration to us all.' *Claire Jackson*

PERFORMANCE ★★
RECORDING ★★★★



BACKGROUND TO...
Brahms's *Symphony No. 1*

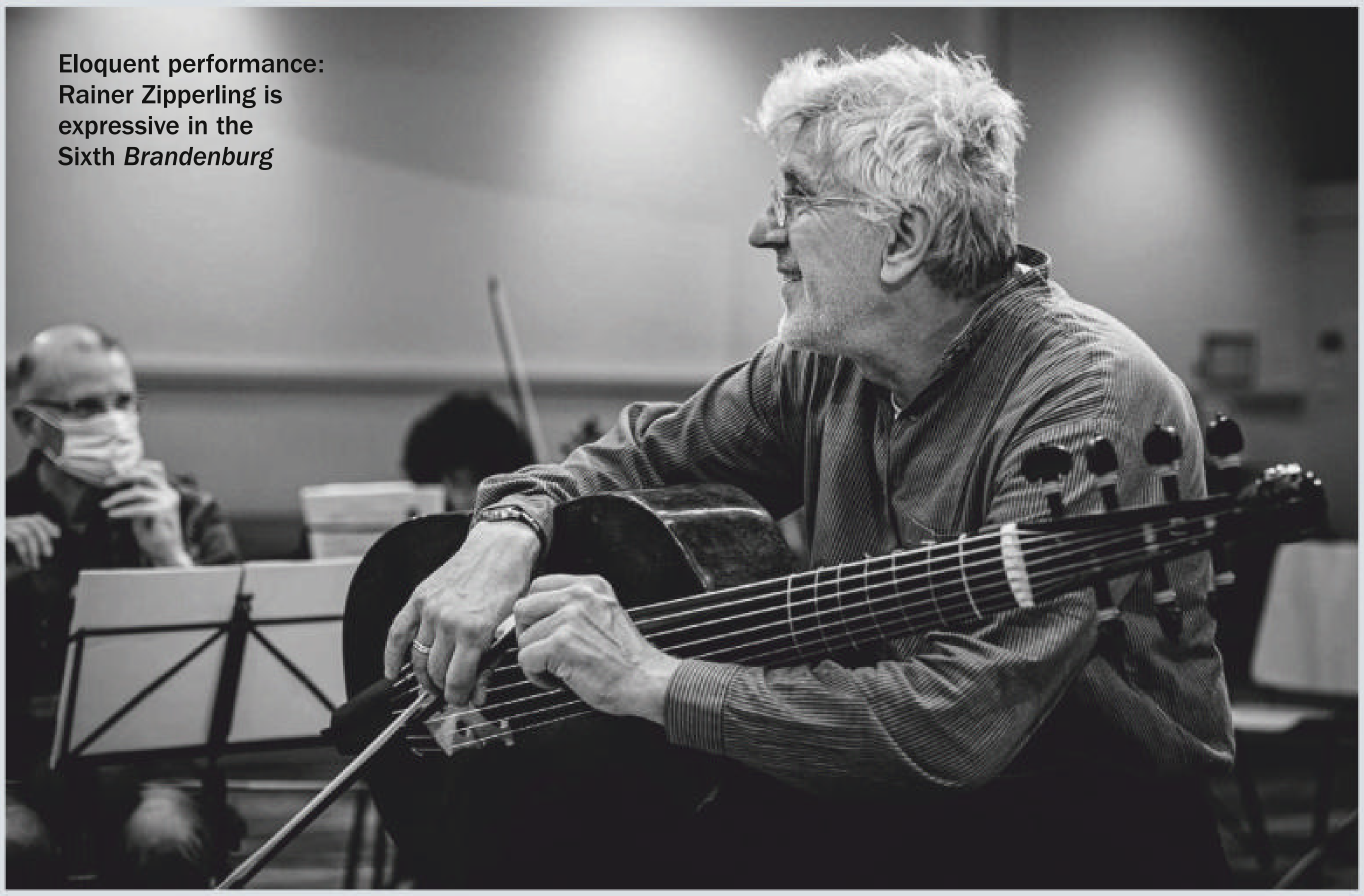
Brahms started out writing his first symphony in the mid-1850s, but didn't actually premiere it until 1876, so plagued was he by self doubt. Despite encouragement from friends, including Robert Schumann, who would never live to hear the work, Brahms continued to tinker and revise. So much so, the music he'd written ended up being used for something else entirely – namely a sonata and concerto, among other things. Back to the drawing board, with a desire to emulate the great Beethoven symphonies he loved, the composer changed keys and finally delivered a Symphony in C minor.

Concerto

CONCERTO CHOICE

Bach and Telemann come together with great effect

Nicholas Anderson finds much to enjoy in this recording from the Orchestra of the 18th Century



Eloquent performance: Rainer Zipperling is expressive in the Sixth *Brandenburg*

The Hidden Reunion

JS Bach: Brandenburg Concerto No. 6; Orchestral Suite No. 2; **Telemann:** Ouverture-Suite for Viola da gamba and Strings, TWV 55:D6
Michael Schmidt-Casdorff (flute), Rainer Zipperling (viola da gamba); Orchestra of the 18th Century
Glossa GCD 921130 57:16 mins

The Hidden Reunion bears no reference to a hitherto undocumented meeting of two lifelong friends – Bach and Telemann – but to the problems of recording an ensemble programme, masked, during the Covid pandemic. A booklet essay takes us through the trials and tribulations of the Orchestra of the 18th Century, while at the same time celebrating its Phoenix-like ascent from the ashes following the death, in 2014, of its founder and director, Frans Brüggen.

The menu is attractive. *Brandenburg* Concerto No. 6 in B flat, with its scoring for violas, viola da gamba, cello, violone and harpsichord, sets a suitably dark-coloured palette for this context. What a sublime work it is and, for the present writer, the most indispensable and enduring of all Bach's concertos. This performance is intimately voiced, texturally clear and eloquently and lovingly articulated.

Telemann's Ouverture-Suite in D major calls for a viola da gamba as solo instrument throughout. The intimacy of the Sixth *Brandenburg* is preserved by the softly spoken voice of the gamba and Rainer Zipperling's solo playing is expressive, though the recorded sound sometimes comes across as hollow and muted. Among the most striking movements are an elegiac Sarabande and a Courante which contains effective polyphony between gamba and violin and the remaining strands of the texture.

The intimacy of the Bach is preserved by the softly spoken gamba

The disc concludes with Bach's Suite in B minor for flute and strings. Michael Schmidt-Casdorff unhurriedly reaches the heart of the piece, always avoiding those all too commonly encountered exaggerated flourishes which add nothing.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

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Barber • Bruch • Vaughan Williams

Bruch: Violin Concerto; **Vaughan Williams:** The Lark Ascending; **Barber:** Violin Concerto*
Sonoko Miriam Welde (violin); Oslo Philharmonic/Tabita Berglund, *Joshua Weilerstein
Lawo Classics LWC1222 60:26 mins

In the (relatively) early days of stereo, the no-holds-barred charismatic intensity of Isaac Stern (with the Philadelphia Orchestra/Ormandy and NYPO/Bernstein in overdrive) achieved an emotional catharsis in the Bruch and Barber concertos that still overwhelms. But with rose-tinted spectacles removed, it seems clear the unstoppable adrenal surge, coupled with high-impact CBS sonics (which rarely drop below a healthy *mezzo-forte*) tell only one side of the story.

This is where Sonoko Miriam Welde really comes into her own. For while she lacks nothing in excitement when the notes start flying, she produces a velvety sonority at low dynamic levels that constantly beguiles the senses. In even the Barber hell-for-leather *moto perpetuo* finale, she manages to subtly vary her dynamics and articulation, so that the music feels stylistically more at one with the heightened lyricism and cantabile composure of the first two movements. In the slow movement of the Bruch, Welde times her phrases to perfection with an unforced tenderness and touching simplicity that radiates contentment.

Yet arguably it is Welde's ravishing performance of Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending* that is the stand-out performance here. Here she achieves an exquisite purity of line and tonal radiance absolutely at one with the lark's delicate flutterings and soaring eloquence. In all three pieces, the Oslo Philharmonic play with distinction under Tabita Berglund and Joshua Weilerstein, who uncover enchanting details of textural interest that are often taken for granted. For Welde, this is an auspicious debut disc. *Julian Haylock*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Bridge • Elgar

Elgar: Cello Concerto;
Bridge: Oration
Gabriel Schwabe (cello); ORF Vienna Symphony Orchestra/ Christopher Ward
Naxos 8.574320 56:06 mins

It's 30 years since Naxos released Maria Kliegel's recording of Elgar's Cello Concerto, and the label's new version is very different. Played by the German cellist Gabriel Schwabe, it lops a full four minutes off Kliegel's spacious interpretation, and is an altogether tauter, more urgent proposition.

Precisely because Schwabe eschews the kind of lingering nostalgia which can easily turn Elgar's masterpiece sentimental, his is one of the most existentially riveting interpretations on disc. The *Scherzo* movement is brilliantly nuanced, with filigree technical detail, the slow movement deeply felt without dragging.

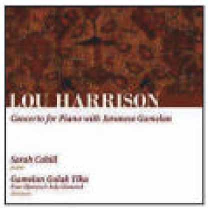
Schwabe's tone is sinewy, his tuning consistently excellent, and conductor Christopher Ward draws sharply proactive playing from the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra. The recording is quite closely balanced, with particularly meaty bass responses, allowing close inspection of Elgar's masterly orchestration. In short, Schwabe's performance is a must for any follower of Elgar's music on record.

Frank Bridge's *Oration* for cello and orchestra is a bold coupling. The performance is again excellent, but the piece itself too often seems tryingly heavy-handed compared to Elgar's economy of gesture. Certainly Schwabe's interpretation of the Elgar repays repeated listening. *Terry Blain*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Harrison

Concerto for Piano with Javanese Gamelan
Sarah Cahill (piano); Gamelan Galak Tika
CMA Recorded Archives 26:00 mins



Lou Harrison (1917-2003) was a ceaseless seeker for new forms of musical beauty. After composing percussion music in the 1930s, he went on to try his hand at 12-tone serialism and music for dance; then, after studying medieval and Renaissance European music, he went deeply into the music of Chinese opera. At Dartington Summer School I once watched him persuading all-comers to enter what he called his 'paradise garden of delights' – the gamelan he'd built with his partner Bill Colvig. His prolific composing spanned many musical worlds.

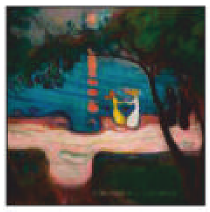
This recording of his rarely-heard Concerto for Piano with Javanese Gamelan was made for the Cleveland Museum of Art, whose policy is to archive historically important works. Pianist Sarah Cahill explained her challenge: it took several re-tunings, weeks apart, for the piano's strings to adjust to the gamelan's requirements, and she found the sound initially disorienting, 'but that disorientation provoked more intense listening'.

In three movements, the concerto starts with dark octaves on the piano, whose grainy sound goes on to blend so well with that of the gamelan that one can hardly discern it as a separate agent; Cahill's touch is perfectly in keeping with the style of the Javanese instrument. In the dreamy middle movement the piano emerges as the star, and we enter a gorgeously ethereal soundworld. *Michael Church*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Ståle Kleiburg

Violin Concerto No. 2*; DOPO for Violoncello and String Orchestra; Viola Concerto†**
*Marianne Thorsen (violin), †Eivind Ringstad (viola), **Fredrik Sjölin (cello); Trondheim Symphony Orchestra/Peter Szilvay
2L 2L-166 (SACD/Audio Blu-ray) 58:01 mins



For Ståle Kleiberg (b1958), composing 'is all about forming an emotional response to my experience of life, of what it means to live.' A Norwegian who cleaves strongly to European classical traditions, his cleanly crafted neo-romantic music has won him many listeners internationally.

This is the second album of string concertos to be issued on 2L with the excellent Trondheim Symphony Orchestra (conducted here by Peter Szilvay): the sumptuous recording

Beguiling Barber: violinist Sonoko Miriam Welde makes an auspicious debut

– whether heard on Blu-ray audio, or as Hi-Res FLAC download – maximises Kleiberg's rich tonal palette in optional surround sound.

Both the Violin Concerto No. 2 (2017) and the Viola Concerto (2019) have three contrasting movements and feature highly sympathetic soloists. Violinist Marianne Thorsen proves supply sweet through the melodic turns of the former work, composed for the painter Kjell Pahr-Iverson whose vibrant colours inform a gentle journey to a final, unexpected ascent in fourths.

Motifs based on specific intervals provide structural glue for the dramatic later work, which viola soloist Eivind Ringstad invigorates with his own rich tonal contrasts. The writing traverses a wider expressive range than does the violin concerto without ever being less than direct and comfortably familiar, the third movement's jaunty woodwind and brass proving welcome aural refreshment.

Far meatier is the 1993 one-movement *DOPO* for cello and string orchestra, the first work of a Holocaust trilogy and prompted by the then unfolding Balkan War. From the yearning major-minor of its opening solo cello – commandingly played by Fredrik Sjölin – to the driving yet suspended orchestral textures, it's at once eloquent and understated. *Steph Power*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Marius Neset

Manmade; Windless; Every Little Step; A Day in the Sparrow's Life
Marius Neset (saxophone); Bergen Philharmonic/Edward Gardner
Chandos CHSA 5298 (CD/SACD) 65:36 mins

One of the problems with concertante works for saxophone, observes Mervyn Cooke in the notes to *Manmade*, is that 'the instrument is so immediately associated with jazz rather than the classical concert music for which it was originally invented.' (It's a on-going issue: only last month a piece I'd filed with another publication was subbed so that Jess Gillam's Wigmore Hall recital was labelled 'jazz'.) The Norwegian saxophonist Marius Neset's music spans multiple genres but is rooted in contemporary classical music; *Manmade* comprises a selection of his latest works, all of which are first recordings.

The title work takes its lead from the climate crisis, with each of its five movements alluding to human innovation and its contribution to the current global challenge. Highly rhythmic as well as richly orchestrated, there are moments when *Manmade* feels like a collaboration between Reich, Adams and Ives (*Apollo* includes a reference to *The Unanswered Question*). Neset

ANNELIES VAN DER VEGT, NADIA NORSKOTT

is a glittering soloist throughout, tightly supported by his compatriots the Bergen Philharmonic under Edward Gardner.

Every Little Step – the composer's reflection on lockdown with his infant daughter – juggles cross-rhythms, modulating time signatures and, in the second movement, the sense of maintaining pulse among chaos. (There are subtle references to late Lennon/McCartney here – timely with the release of *The Beatles: Get Back* on Disney Plus.) *A Day in the Sparrow's Life* is a joyful and sometimes abstract (think Richard Rodney Bennett) piece that began life as a solo work. The rather aimless and saccharine *Windless* unfortunately lets down this otherwise excellent collection. *Claire Jackson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Reger

Piano Concerto; Six Intermezzi
Joseph Moog (piano); German Radio Philharmonic Orchestra/Nicholas Milton
Onyx ONYX4235 59:57 mins

Very much in the mould of the Brahms D minor, Reger's Concerto opens with thundering timpani and wrenching thematic phrases in the strings, and the first solo entry is equally striking in its power and dynamic heft. What's missing though, among all the rich harmony and romantic fervour, is consistently memorable melodic material and a sense of direction. The more lyrical second theme shows pianist Joseph Moog's strengths in characterising line and texture, but exposes some unevenness in the tuning and regulation of his instrument.

The slow movement, based on Passion Chorales, has more coherence, but still its fair share of note-spinning, although it's warmly and sensitively played all round. In the finale, the ghost of Brahms again raises its head, and there is a sense of fun in the lighter parts of this dance-like movement, but much is relentless and over-scored, and there's little that the performers can do to ameliorate this. On the plus side, there's a wide dynamic range, well projected by the recording.

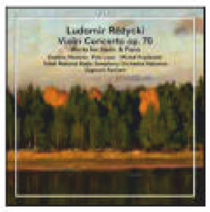
Structurally clearer and better proportioned are the short *Intermezzi*, where there's a greater feeling of rhythmic and thematic concentration. The second, fourth and sixth are all in ternary form, with the outer puckish sections framing a more chromatic trio, sometimes with the slow tread of a chorale. Moog has the virtuosity to negotiate Reger's finger-twisting demands, as well as the tonal resources for the chordal textures of the other intermezzi. If you like the idea of Brahms on steroids, you'll like these. *Martin Cotton*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Multi-tasking musician: Marius Neset is a glittering soloist and impressive composer

Różycki

Violin Concerto, Op. 70; Two Melodies; Two Nocturnes; Pan Twardowski – excerpts
Ewelina Nowicka (violin), Pola Lazar, Michał Krężlewski (piano); Polish National Radio Symphony Katowice/Zymunt Rychert
CPO 555 421-2 49:31 mins



Ludomir Różycki's Violin Concerto Op. 70 has appeared in two guises in recent years, remarkable considering the unfinished score spent some three years buried in a back garden in Warsaw after the composer fled the brutally sadistic Nazi suppression of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. This version, recorded in 2010 by Ewelina Nowicka and the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra Katowice, was constructed in 2000 by Zygmunt Rychert from an orchestral fragment and a full piano reduction, and predates the 2018 orchestration, recently released, by Janusz Wawrowski.

Różycki, a peer of Symanowski, was a Romantic in 20th century garb. Likened to Korngold, he studied under Engelbert Humperdinck, although he was very much his own man, as demonstrated in this rendering of his joyous Violin Concerto, from the bittersweet, magical *Andante* to the unselfconsciously flamboyant *Allegro Deciso*, opening with ballroom-like pomp and flair, seguing to ecstatic, virtuosic violin – no problem for Nowicka. Resolutely positive despite the circumstances surrounding its creation, the skilful, occasionally heavy orchestration is intuited from Różycki's early works.

It stands in interesting contrast to the skeins that are his *Deux Melodies* and *Deux Nocturnes* for violin and piano – melancholic or dance-like, these quiet little pieces are movingly played by Nowicka and pianist Pola Lazar.

Michał Krężlewski is the pianist for Nowicka's excellent transcriptions of four pieces from Różycki's once much-loved ballet, *Pan Twardowski* (1912-20). Lively, descriptive, and like the rest of Różycki's music, much deserving of wider note, the pieces range from the earthy 'Apparition de Lucifer' to the darkly infectious 'Danse entre les Poignards', sharply played by both soloists. *Sarah Urwin Jones*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Vivaldi

The Four Seasons; Trio Sonata, Op. 1 No. 12 'La Folia' – arr. for soloist and orchestra
Francisco Fullana (violin); Apollo's Fire/Jeanette Sorrell
Avie AV2485 52:25 mins

And still they come... Here is yet another recording of *The Four Seasons*, whose versions on disc are now almost countless. In the sense that our ears seldom if ever respond negatively to the music speaks volumes for its quality. Quite simply, the four concertos are very fine ones, whose programmatic content tweaks our sensibilities and enlivens the imagination, both of the players and their audience. Apart from hints inscribed in the instrumental parts, the code-breaking of the seasonal programme is partly a matter of guesswork.

Apollo's Fire, though, does most of the work for us in a note which provides a detailed if, at times, personal elucidation of Vivaldi's programme. Also included are the four descriptive sonnets, perhaps the work of the composer himself, who included them in the printed edition some years after composing the music. Soloist Francisco Fullana reveals its poetry with effortless refinement and rhythmic elasticity. He is not afraid to be carried off into personal flights of fancy; though they can be justified for the most part, now and again they perhaps just occasionally sit uncomfortably within the stylistic context.

What I enjoyed most of all in the affectionate and carefully thought out playing of soloist and ensemble is their relaxed phrasing and crisp articulation which generate unflagging interest.

In addition to *The Four Seasons* Jeannette Sorrell, director of Apollo's Fire, has arranged Vivaldi's trio sonata *La Folia* as a concerto grosso, so that 'all of us could join in the fray'. Terrific stuff! *Nicholas Anderson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

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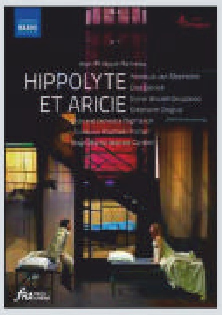

Rameau's colourful first opera gloriously captured in Paris

Top-class musicianship and keen creative forces come together to make a sublime production, says ***Berta Joncus***

Light and shade: Elsa Benoit sings Aricie with striking artistry

ADRIAN SCHAETZ

Rameau

Hippolyte et Aricie (DVD)
Reinoud van Mechelen, Elsa Benoit, Sylvie Brunet-Grupposo, Stéphane Degout, Lea Desandre; Pygmalion/Raphaël Pichon; dir. Jeanne Candel (Paris, 2020)
Naxos 2.110707 140 mins

Here's a captivating, glorious performance, complemented by Jeanne Candel's cheeky yet sensitive stage direction brought home through innovative cinematography. Such collective effort is needed to navigate Rameau's first-ever opera, which piles one densely composed scene on top of another, as Hippolyte's union with Aricie is thwarted by his step-mother Phèdre, herself in love with Hippolyte, while Phèdre's husband Thésée is off visiting the Underworld.

The principals embody the drama played out by their characters. Sylvie Brunet-Grupposo's raw power as Phèdre in Act I collapses to a whispered vulnerability in her Act III confession. Elsa Benoit's Aricie pivots from radiant arioso to dark brooding, with gorgeous new vocal colours, to lament Hippolyte's apparent death. Reinould van Mechelen's Hippolyte damps down his desire until the flaming lyricism of his Act IV monologue. But it is mezzo soprano Lea Desandre, in four different roles, who shines brightest. In the daring soft-coloratura pastoral air with which Rameau closed the opera, Desandre ascends with apparent ease into the stratosphere.

Mezzo-soprano Lea Desandre shines brightest in four different roles

Raphaël Pichon aids plot coherence by joining up solo verse lines in unexpected ways and licensing instrumental interventions in the action. Handheld cameras bring out the wit of Candel's staging which brings out a sublime ingenuity in Rameau that's too often obscured.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
PICTURE & SOUND ★★★★★

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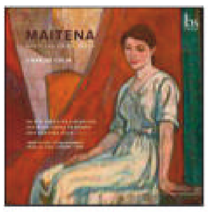
Colin

Maitena – excerpts
Estíbaliz Sánchez, Miren Urbieta-Vega, Mikeldi Atxalandabaso, José Manuel Diaz, Marifé Nogales, Fernando Latorre; Sociedad Coral de Bilbao; Bilbao Symphony Orchestra/Iker Sánchez Silva
IBS Classical IBS152021
94:43 mins (2 discs)



One of the earliest Basque operas, *Maitena* by Charles Colin (1863-1951) was first performed in Bilbao in 1909, and up to the 1930s it received a number of productions in the Basque country, Spain, France and Mexico. With no dialogue and a few minor cuts, this is its first (almost) complete recording.

Étienne Decrept's libretto begins in a Basque village. Wealthy farmer Piarrés wishes his daughter Maitena to marry wellborn Ganich rather than the lowly Domingo, but she disobeys him and leaves for America with the latter. Left widowed in Buenos Aires, she returns to experience initial rejection but eventual acceptance as she finally marries Ganich.

The title role is delivered with delicacy by Miren Urbieta-Vega. Mikeldi Atxalandabaso brings a vital tenor to Domingo, and both José Manuel Diaz as Ganich and Fernando Latorre as Piarrés are firmly focused.

Though Colin shows himself a skilful composer, his score – a few fleeting reminiscences of *Cavalleria rusticana* aside – is old fashioned for its date. It's a predominantly lyrical piece with some naive dramatic touches: its national element consists of a use of Basque dance rhythms – the overture begins with a *Tempo de Zortziko* in 5/8. The opera has recently been reorchestrated by Angel Briz Lázcoz, which presumably means that the original is missing.

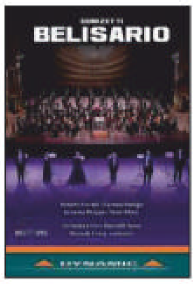
The chorus can claim a relationship with the piece going back as far as the first performance, and the modest-sized orchestra is perfectly capable, while the conductor gives the music both flow and flexibility. No libretto is included. The sound is a touch raw.
George Hall

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Donizetti

Belisario (DVD)

Roberto Frontali, Simon Lim, Carmela Remigio, Annalisa Stroppa, Klodjan Kaçani; Orchestra Donizetti Opera/Riccardo Frizza; dir. Matteo Ricchetti (Bergamo, 2020)
Dynamic DVD: 37907; Blu-ray: 57907 131 mins



The Teatro Donizetti in Bergamo continues its large-scale project of releasing on DVD the composer's more obscure works. Composed immediately after *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Belisario*, set in sixth-century Byzantium, was far removed from its predecessor in subject matter, and though an initial hit was destined for less enduring fame. The story is one of quasi-filial devotion between a general and his prisoner of war, and of a grieving mother's desire for revenge.

This DVD presents a concert performance, recorded in November 2020 without audience and with orchestra and chorus masked. The obvious limitations of the format are, on the whole, successfully mitigated. Placing the principals in the stalls, facing the orchestra, allows them to move around, be more expressive than is usual in such performances, and engage with their fellow musicians. Cutting the score to just over an hour of music gives us a succession of attractive numbers without the longueurs that sometimes make Donizetti's works challenging for a present-day audience, as well as simplifying the plot.

The principals are, without exception, first-rate. Roberto Frontali in the title role has a voice that speaks profoundly of authority and wisdom. Carmela Remigio, as his grieving and aggrieved wife Antonina, plumbs the emotional depths with dignity and purity of tone. Annalisa Stroppa gives a spirited performance as Belisario's daughter Irene and appears to be enjoying herself immensely. Supporting roles, too, are finely sung, particularly Klodjan Kaçani's fresh-voiced Eutropio. Spritely conducting from Riccardo Frizza rounds off a very enjoyable package. *Alexandra Wilson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Flury

Die helle Nacht

Daniel Ochea, Julia Sophie Wagner, Magnus Vigilius; Gottingen Symphony Orchestra/Paul Mann
Toccata Classics TOCC 0580
106:49 mins (2 discs)

Despite support from leading musicians in his lifetime, the Swiss composer Richard Flury (1896-1967) languishes in obscurity. This studio recording confirms the exceptional quality of the second of his four operas, *Die helle Nacht*: a dark and at times macabre piece, this had just one broadcast performance in 1935, and still awaits a staging. Set in Paris, 1514, its central character is a Doctor with an almost pathological jealousy of his wife Solange, who 15 years earlier had a night of infidelity with a hedonistic Knight. Chance presents him an opportunity to take revenge upon her lover. At first he seizes it, but ultimately relents, allowing the Knight to live. The opera ends on a note of redemption and renewal.

Composed 1932-35, the opera's rich and complex late-Romantic idiom recalls Strauss, Korngold and even momentarily Berg. The instrumentation is not enormous, yet Flury's soundworld is lavish and his orchestration virtuosic. There's a lyricism to his vocal lines, too. Daniel Ochoa delivers a keenly etched psychological portrayal of the Doctor, while Magnus Vigilius's buoyant Heldentenor makes a brave shot at the role of the Knight. Julia Sophie Wagner is an expressive Solange. Impressive standards from both chorus and orchestra, and Paul Mann's conducting has vitality. *George Hall*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Puccini

Madama Butterfly

Melody Moore, Stefano Secco, Lester Lynch; Gulbenkian Chorus & Orchestra/Lawrence Foster
Pentatone PTC 5186 783 (CD/SACD)
143:22 mins (2 discs)

In this new recording, the opera's symphonic quality is emphasised to the max by conductor Lawrence Foster. Much of the orchestral playing, flatteringly recorded, is voluptuous – shimmeringly beautiful at Butterfly's entrance, in the love duet and in the intermezzo. Some of the tempos, however, are indulgently slow, notably in the opening scene, lessening the impact of those moments that require a certain dynamic spark.

Some of the singing is also on the heavy side. One doesn't necessarily want the 'little girl' voice some sopranos adopt at the start of this opera, but one needs some sort of transition from the naive Butterfly to her more mature self. Nevertheless, Melody Moore's deeply resonant, almost mezzo-like voice is a thing of beauty, and she certainly brings intensity to the opera's ending. Stefano Secco sings Pinkerton sensitively, albeit with occasional tightness in the upper range.

As I noted in December's Building a Library, the *Butterfly* back catalogue is vast yet still dominated by vintage recordings. This new set may not necessarily be a top-ranking choice – giving Puccini the full Wagner treatment only works up to a point – but it is certainly one with new things to say. It is also good to see Pentatone giving a new generation of singers the opportunity to put its stamp on core repertoire works such as this. *Alexandra Wilson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Puccini

Tosca (DVD)

Karine Babajanyan, Piotr Beczała, Carlos Álvarez; Vienna State Opera Chorus & Orchestra/Marco Armiliato; dir. Margarethe Wallmann (Vienna, 2019)
C Major DVD: 759108; Blu-ray: 759204 129 mins

Magarethe Wallman's traditional – that is, conservative – approach to Puccini's melodrama clearly suits the Viennese audience. Wallmann bypasses the politics that recent productions have explored: a freedom fighter who is an artist, a venal police chief and an abused woman driven to murder.

This *Tosca* is a vehicle for three star singers and Ella Gallieni's video production focuses on Cavaradossi, Tosca and Scarpia, bathing the rest of the action in shadows. Rome after Buonaparte's victory at Marengo is indeed a dark place. The costumes are 'properly' period too, although Carlos Álvarez's improbable wig turns his Scarpia into a first cousin of Lewis Carroll's Frog Footman.

Álvarez is an old hand at curdling the blood, and Cavaradossi's torture is repellent. As Tosca – standing in for an indisposed Nina Stemme – Karine Babajanyan bears an uncanny resemblance to Callas. Her plaintive lyric voice is appealing but she rarely unleashes her stage tigress even when she all but butchers Scarpia. But it's the Polish tenor Piotr Beczała's Cavaradossi that the audience have paid to hear. His 'Recondite armonia' is tentative but by the time we reach 'E lucevan le stelle' he really delivers. Beczała may not be a lyric Italian tenor but he knows how to tug at the heartstrings, which is more than can be said for the conductor Marco Armiliato who seems to have left his heart at home. *Christopher Cook*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
PICTURE & SOUND ★★★★

BACKGROUND TO...

Rameau's *Hippoltye et Aricie*

Rameau dipped his toe into the world of opera with this debut work at the age of 50. He'd have been forgiven for not writing another, given the divided response to the five-act tragedy upon its Paris premiere in 1733. It ignited fury from opera lovers beholden to Lully and bewitched those who were dazzled by its extravagances. Structurally no different to your average Lully opera, Rameau's take on the art form was musically ambitious, to say the least. Revivals were popular enough in his lifetime, but the work soon vanished from the stage after his death.

Choral & Song

CHORAL & SONG CHOICE

A glorious feast from Norway's finest

David Nice **is enraptured by Lise Davidsen's outstanding set of Grieg songs**

Grieg

Haugtussa, Op. 67; Elegiac Poems – To Her I & II etc

Lise Davidsen (soprano), Leif Ove Andsnes (piano)

Decca 485 2254 79:48 mins

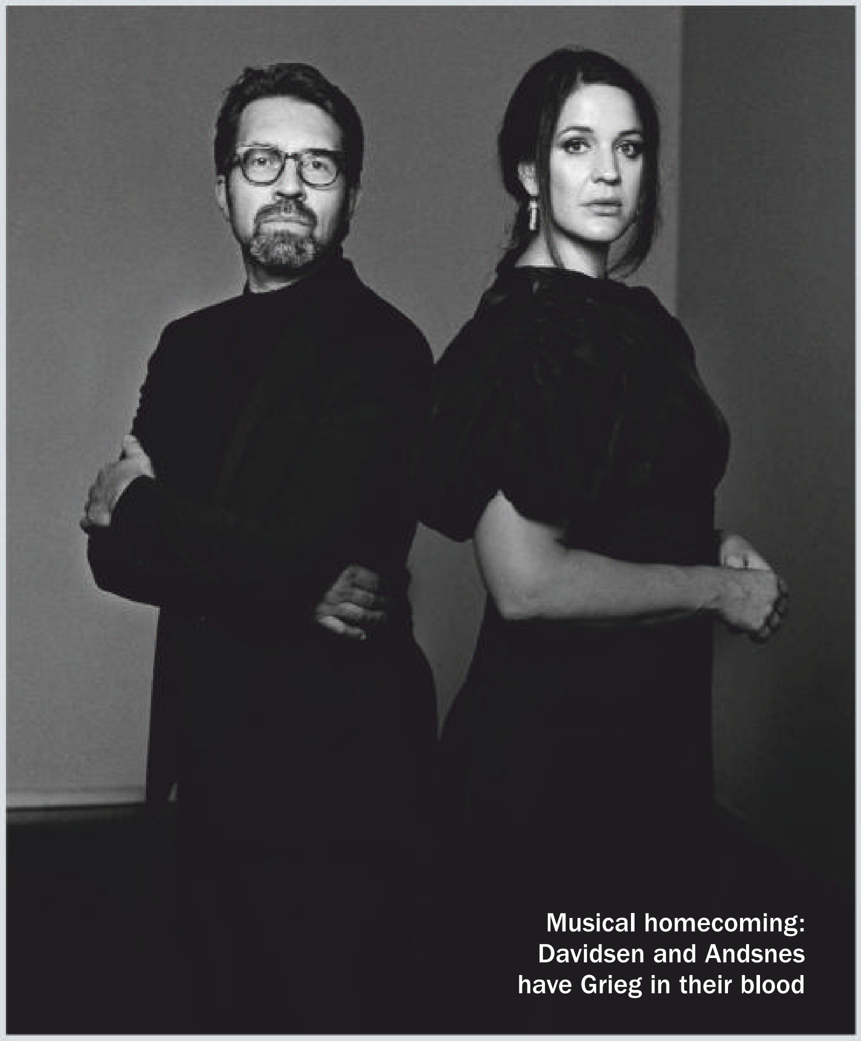
This is the outstanding Lise Davidsen recording many of us who've experienced the phenomenon live have been waiting for, and the partnership with Norway's other best-known national treasure, pianist Leif Ove Andsnes, doubles the pleasure. The trouble with Davidsen's debut disc was that she wasn't yet 'inside' classics like Strauss's *Four Last Songs*, for instance. Grieg's songs, though, are in the bloodstream; the full range up to that glorious and still-focused upper register is complemented here by word colouring and vivid dramatisation.

The partnership with Leif Ove Andsnes doubles the pleasure

It's vital that the recital begins with Grieg's only connected song-cycle, *Haugtussa*, about an earthy mountain girl; Andsnes's vintage mountain-spring sound kicks off, and then we have a dark cliff face from both. There's rapture at the centre of the sequence, where the same-stanza format suddenly gives way to greater generosity, and an uncanny ability to hit every note dead centre. Both artists capture the subtle shifts between bubbling natural surroundings and human suffering in the masterly final number, 'At the Gjaetle Brook'.

The range makes this easy to enjoy at a single sitting, from outdoor rumbustiousness to tenderest introspection. I'm equally fond of the brighter, lighter sound of Claire Booth in the Op. 48 set to German texts, where Davidsen's tone seems to darken a little with the change of language after plenty of smiling brightness, but the gamut run is so impressive. And I'm grateful to hear Grieg songs I didn't know, especially the lovely father's greeting from England to his 'gentleman' son, the second of the Otto Bengzon settings.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



Musical homecoming: Davidsen and Andsnes have Grieg in their blood

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C Loewe – *The Other Erlking*

Songs and Ballads

Nicholas Mogg (baritone), Jâms Coleman (piano)

Champs Hill CHRCD165 60:18 mins

Carl Loewe's dramatic ballads, much admired in 19th-century Europe, continue to appeal to voice-piano duos who enjoy a ripping yarn. Nicholas Mogg and Jâms Coleman mix those songs with several overlooked lyrical numbers. Some prove musically less interesting than the enthusiastic liner note suggests (for example, 'Über allen Gipfeln' has beautiful moments but doesn't sustain interest overall), and others are genuinely attractive discoveries.

This demanding repertoire requires immaculate German and the ability to inhabit the characters through all their travails. The piano must depict everything from tolling bells to elf-kings (and their daughters) and the deep sea, while simultaneously sustaining occasionally over-large forms. Overall, Coleman and Mogg deliver, especially in the dramatic numbers. Mogg is comfortable across the enormous range and demonstrates much of the timbral flexibility these songs need. Coleman's playing is outstanding, with thrilling variety in the shimmering piano textures of 'Erlkönig'; similarly, 'Herr Oluf' and 'Die wandelnde Glocke' inspire huge variety and imagination at the piano.

Mogg could more fully exploit opportunities like the mother-son contrast in the grisly ballad 'Edward', the tranquillity of 'Der du von dem Himmel bist', or the legato of 'Spirito Santo', especially to match Coleman's exquisite touch. In thrillers like 'Odins Meeresritt', he's more convincing, as well as in comic numbers like 'Der alte Goethe'.

There's much to admire here, even if Loewe's strengths perhaps don't extend as far beyond ballads as these musicians would have us believe. We can certainly look forward to their next project. *Natasha Loges*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Mahler • Wagner
– *Live from Salzburg*

Wagner: Wesendonck-Lieder; **Mahler:** Rückert-Lieder

Elīna Garanča (soprano); Vienna Philharmonic/Christian Thielemann

DG 486 1929 38:58 mins

Salzburg was luckier than most festivals during the Covid Augusts of 2020 and 2021 in being able to field a pair of magnificent artists, Elīna Garanča and Christian Thielemann performing Wagner and Mahler. This was surely the first live music that many in the audience had heard in months, which makes this recording all the more affecting.

Garanča is utterly dependable in the *Wesendonck Lieder*. Her 'Träume' is silky at the start and the tempos slower than we are accustomed to, but phrase by phrase she weaves a hypnotic spell while Thielemann does something remarkable at the end, fading the music until it seems like smoke drifting across a landscape. Singer and conductor are at one in 'Schmerzen', Garanča's immaculate diction making every word count and Thielemann matching her scrupulous attention to detail – the solo trumpet in the postlude is properly audible.

Yet it's Mahler who brings out the very best in both singer and conductor. 'Um Mitternacht' is transformed into a small-scale symphony with Garanča mapping every movement of the drama and truly anguished when she sings of human suffering in the fourth verse. Thielemann refuses to soften the angularity of its orchestration, turning the trumpets in the final verse into a blazing chorale. The last of these Rückert songs, 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen', played as if it were chamber music, hints at the final movement of *Das Lied von der Erde*: those tremulous strings and the solo horn are just as bleak as 'Der Abschied'. *Christopher Cook*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Messiaen

Cinq rechants; O sacrum convivium; plus works by Debussy, Mahler and Ravel
Kammerchor Stuttgart/
Frieder Bernius
Carus CAR83523 42:28 mins

Where does contemporary choral technique begin? There is a strong case for saying it was in 1948 with Messiaen's *Cinq rechants*, his fiendishly difficult showcase for 12 unaccompanied voices. The third panel of his *Tristan Triptych*, this heady exploration of fervent love blends jaunty tunes, scrunchy harmonies and fluid rhythms for a text that intermingles Sanskrit-and Quechua-inspired invented words with intimate declarations and references to great lovers.

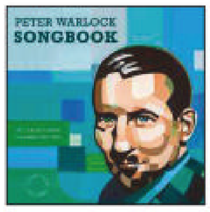
Sung here with 16 voices, the Kammerchor Stuttgart under the direction of Frieder Bernius are certainly up to the technical challenge. The opening of the second *Rechant* is suitably languid as are the glowing close harmonies of the third's 'Ma robe d'amour', and there is commendable precision for the tumbling cries of 'sarî' that follow. However, while there is an intensity of singing, there is only intermittently a corresponding sense of Messiaen's overwhelming, intoxicating, passionate love. Admittedly, the over-resonant acoustic undermines some of the impact, but there could be more intent to the driving rhythms, greater abandon in the joyful dances and a deeper sense of ardour throughout.

The more chaste fervour of Messiaen's 1937 communion motet *O sacrum convivium* is beautifully sung. Usually sung unaccompanied, the voices are joined here by organ, providing a different colour, but it tends to overwhelm the more subdued passages. Four of Clytus Gottwald's choral arrangements of Debussy, Ravel and Mahler in previously released recordings from 1996 and 2004 act as fillers. They are enchanting, but just 23 minutes of new material is short shrift. *Christopher Dingle*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Warlock

Saudades – selection; Cradle Song; The Water Lily; Lullaby etc
Luci Briginshaw (soprano),
Eleanor Meynell (piano)
Convivium CR062 56:22 mins



Recordings of Peter Warlock's songs are largely dominated by male singers, so on that count alone this new disc by soprano Luci Briginshaw is welcome. Her recital, though, does much more than fill a niche in the discographical market. Carefully planned, chronologically, it charts a stimulating path through Warlock's song-writing career, offering 28 of the roughly 150 settings he completed.

Briginshaw lays down impressive markers early, with a gently wistful take on Warlock's first Shakespeare setting 'Take, o take those lips away', and an insinuating melancholy in 'Heraclitus'. While her diction is clear, it's the broader attention to line and contour which lends particular distinction to Briginshaw's singing, words nestling comfortably on Warlock's harmonically adventurous melodies.

Skill and assurance: Marian Consort take a trip on the Adriatic

NICK RUTTER

The Elizabethan influences in 'The bayly berith the bell away' are astutely subsumed in Briginshaw's heart-tugging rendition, both she and pianist Eleanor Meynell excelling in its lingering, regretful coda. In 'Dedication', Briginshaw opens the throttle on a voice which has considerable power in reserve, but can't save the song from seeming suspiciously full of bluster. Generally Warlock shows more subtlety than that, especially in songs like 'Sleep' and 'Autumn Twilight', which underlay relatively straightforward vocal lines with more complex, probing piano commentary. 'Spring' is more light-spirited, with both voice and keyboard chirruping in lively, mimetic fashion, while the raptly performed 'The Night' is more abstemiously fashioned.

Briginshaw's notes on the songs are uncommonly good, adding considerable value to her recital. *Terry Blain*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Adriatic Voyage – *17th-Century Music from Venice to Dalmatia*

Works by Cecchino, Jelić, Lukačić, Puliti, Skjavetić, B Sorte and Usper
Marian Consort/
Rory McCleery (countertenor);
Illyria Consort/Bojan Čičić (violin)
Delphian DCD34260 58:26 mins

While the Venetian musical hinterland of the Gabrielis or Claudio Monteverdi is relatively well mapped, what price the likes of Ivan Lukačić, Vinko Jelić, or Julije Skovelić (to give them their original names)? The five voices of the Marian Consort join forces with an Illyria Consort, fielding fruity cornettos, dulcian and sackbuts, alongside strings and continuo. They retrace a journey from Venice down the Croatian coast to Constantinople led, in 1575, by the diplomat and naval commander Giacomo Soranzo. Included, appropriately, is Bartolomeo Sorte's madrigal in praise of Soranzo, *I superbi colossi*; and a resounding eight-part *Battaglia* for voices and instruments by Francesco Usper fires an exuberant 21-gun salute to mark the end of a voyage that had begun more serenely with his ravishing setting of the Ave Maria.

Already the bar has been set high as the instrumentalists ornament the singers' burnished restraint with consummate skill, imagination and good taste. And it's neatly offset by a younger Usper's lithe Sonata a 4 – music sacred and secular illuminating the exploration of an eminently rewarding Italo-Slav rapprochement. Countertenor

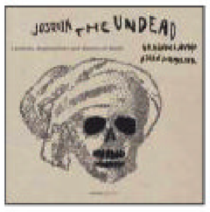
Rory McCleary avoids emotional overstatement in an affectionately-realised account of Puliti's madrigal Dona ingrata; while the mellifluous tenor duetting of Jelić's Bone Jesu is answered by the bracing vigour of bass Edmund Saddington in the same composer's lively Exultate Deo.

Throughout, singers and instrumentalists breathe and communicate as one, their rapport unbreakable. A recording, in short, packed with fresh discoveries at every turn; and a vivid snapshot of 'La Serenissima's ear-expanding outreach throughout its wider domains. *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Josquin the Undead

Laments, deplorations and dances of death by Josquin, Gombert, Jean Le Brun and Appenzeller
Graindelavoix/Björn Schmelzer
Glossa GCDP32117 75:29 mins



Last year was the 500th anniversary of Josquin's death. This recording is based on a collection of his works published by Tielman Susato in 1545 in Antwerp. Just a few months ago, however, Dominique Visse (on Ricercar) also produced a version of the collection. No matter. The two approaches are interestingly different.

Traditionalists will probably prefer the Visse version with its straightforward rhythms and uncomplicated textures. Graindalavoix are more adventurous. They incorporate instrumental elaborations and add ornaments to the individual lines. In a piece such as *Parfons regretz*. this allows the singer of a particular part to sing as though responding to the text personally with slightly free momentary musical flickers of grief (the inner parts are played on instruments). In *Nymphes, nappé*, by contrast the texture is held together by a bass line that moves in a modern way with strong directional intervals. This binds the surface embellishments more clearly to the natural momentum of the overall texture and produces a more corporate expression of grief – though Björn Schmelzer 'enhances' these musical explanations in the liner notes with references to Freud, the soul, Josquin's 'undead' presence and so on. The lighter pieces include *Petite camusette* which is based on a popular song, sung solo first, then surrounded by a delightful jamboree of vocal and instrumental forces. The finest singing on the disc comes in two great laments: Josquin's *Nymphes de bois* (on the death of the composer Ockeghem), and Appenzeller's *Musae Jovis* written on the death of Josquin himself. *Anthony Pryer*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Prémices

Debussy: Ariettes Oubliées; Coquetterie posthume etc; **Rihm:** Hölderlin-Gedichte; **Schoenberg:** Lieder, Op. 2; **R Strauss:** Mädchenblumen, Op. 22
Sheva Tehoval (soprano), Daniel Heide (piano)
CAvi-music AVI 8553039 63:55 mins

Sheva Tehoval is Belgian by birth and a former student of tenor Christoph Prégardien in Cologne, so you would expect her to feel at home in a programme of both French and German songs. That said, and while her high-flying, super-secure and beautifully clear soprano voice gives her plentiful options in either repertoire, there's no mistaking where her instinctive roots lie. Debussy's cycle *Ariettes oubliées* (Forgotten Songs) at once showcases Tehoval's rapport with the composer's soundworld of poised sensuality and tonal finesse; she finds poignancy in 'Il pleure dans mon coeur', then sparky verve in 'Chevaux de bois'. Twin highlights in the closing second group of Debussy items are 'Beau soir' (its mood of dreamy rapture exactly caught) and 'Coquetterie posthume' (roguish to the manner born).

In her choice of German-language songs, with their need for more demonstrative expression, Tehoval's upper-register tone sometimes tightens a little too much. But again her interpretations ring true: Strauss's *Mädchenblumen* (Girls' Flowers) cycle feels fresh and spontaneous, and while Schoenberg's set of late-Romantic Lieder Op. 2 ideally require a larger voice, their close-to-decadent expressive world is well captured.

For a present-day composer to create a modern counterpart to this kind of classic song repertoire is a difficult challenge, but it can be done, as Tehoval shows us in Wolfgang Rihm's *Three Hölderlin Poems* of 2004. Daniel Heide's accompaniments are at every point immaculately weighted and shaded both in relation to the music itself, and to its gifted singer. Minor irritant: the CD booklet has the song texts, but no translations. *Malcolm Hayes*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

The Florentine Renaissance

Works by Binchois, Dufay, Isaac and Anon.
Orlando Consort
Hyperion CDA68349 68:27 mins

This recording journeys through 15th-century Florence, evoking its carnivals and parades and celebrating its many glories – its cathedral, its beautiful women and its cultural heyday under Lorenzo the Magnificent, whose poems we hear in contemporary settings. The sequence ends with the austere years of the 1490s, when the Dominican friar Savonarola petrified Florentines with his apocalyptic sermons.

Rigorously researched and featuring several new reconstructions by Patrick Macey, the programme also shows the impact of the Oltremontani – composers from 'beyond the mountains'. Among them was Guillaume Dufay, whose celebrated motet *Nuper rosarum flores*, written for the consecration of Florence's Duomo in 1436, sounds refreshingly lithe and supple in this one-to-a part performance. In the same composer's *Salve flos Tuscae gentis*, the consort's sound is honeyed and mellifluous as the text praises Florence's dazzling intellectuals and lovely maidens, but the tone darkens, becoming plangent and introspective in *Quis dabit meo aquam*, Isaac's lament on the death of Lorenzo de'Medici.

Several vernacular numbers lighten the mood, including some raunchy carnival songs – though the Orlandos sound overly polite here, given the brazenly ribald texts. More effective is their tripping account of 'Hora mai che fora son', about a nun who has left her convent and invokes all her sisters to burn their habits! Ironically, it was later transformed into a lauda – a spiritual song, nurtured by Savonarola, which we also hear in an aptly sober reading.

Throughout the programme, the four voices of the Orlando Consort are beautifully balanced, their intonation and diction nigh flawless. *Kate Bolton-Porciatti*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

The Tree

Works by Elgar, Bingen, J Harvey, Hildegard, Howells, Parry, Stainer, Stanford et al
Jack Ross (trumpet); Choir of St John's College, Cambridge/Andrew Nethsingha; Joseph Wicks, Glen Dempsey, John Challenger (organ)
Signum Classics SIGCD691 65:33 mins

An album of hope for recovery. Andrew Nethsingha is explicit in his eloquent booklet essay that this latest well-crafted and beautifully sung disc from the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge is about rebuilding 'after pandemic and political upheaval'. The title is shared with Jonathan Harvey's ethereally floating motet *The Tree*, whose text from *Job* that a cut-down tree can sprout again provides inspiration. The forces involved steadily grow, from a single treble line for Hildegard of Bingen's 'O pastor animarum', adding parts and singers, culminating in nearly 500 voices for Rowlands's hymn 'Love Divine, all loves excelling'.

The programme explores various branches of British choral music, from established stalwarts such as Stainer, Parry, Stanford and Elgar to the deliciously scrunchy harmonies and joyfully rambunctious trumpet outbursts of James Long's 'sicut aquilae'. Much of this is also a reminder of the choir's heritage, with about half the disc directed by Nethsingha's two predecessors, Christopher Robinson and David Hill, the latter adding his current choir, Yale Schola cantorum, for a heartfelt performance of Howells's rarely recorded Preces and Responses. Most of the performances are recorded live from pre-pandemic services, the audibly present congregation not to be taken for granted. *Christopher Dingle*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

London Symphony Orchestra
Sir Antonio Pappano
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Symphonies Nos 4 & 6
Nominated for a 2022 BBC Music Magazine Award!
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Throughout 2022
Roderick Williams
Voices Unwrapped Artist-in-Focus
25 Feb – with Aurora Orchestra
5 May – with Paul Cibis (piano)
Highlights
13 Jan
Eric Whitacre conducts VOCES8
The Sacred Veil
12 Feb
Theatre of Voices
John Luther Adams + David Lang
26 Mar
Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir
Pärt | Tormis | Tulev | Kreek
2 Apr
Aurora Orchestra with BBC Singers
MacMillan: Seven Last Words
10 Jun
Musica Secreta
Motets by Suor Leonora d'Este and Suor Maria Celeste Galilei
19 Jun
Manchester Collective with Ruby Hughes
Strozzi | Britten | Mustonen | Finnis
30 Sep
Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment
Haydn: Nelson Mass
20 Oct
The Gesualdo Six
Mirror of Time – from Josquin to Pärt
17 Nov
The Tallis Scholars
Allegri | Tallis | Josquin
24 Nov
The Sixteen
The Song of Songs
3 Dec
Abel Selaocoe with BBC Singers
Rachmaninov | Gubaidulina
kingsplace.co.uk/voices
Roderick Williams © Simon van Boxtel

Chamber

CHAMBER CHOICE

Radiant Russian memorials and unforgettable playing

These performances of Arensky and Shostakovich masterpieces linger in the memory, says ***David Nice***

Lyrical sophistication: Trio Con Brio bring this music to vivid life

Arensky • Shostakovich

Arensky: Piano Trio No. 1;
Shostakovich: Piano Trios Nos 1 & 2
Trio Con Brio Copenhagen
Orchid Classics ORC100181 69:50 mins

Ghosts haunt all three piano trios in this well-planned triptych, even in the one which isn't a memorial – Shostakovich's original early work first titled *Poeme* and celebrating a star-crossed teenage love with Tatyana Glivenko. What connects this, the Arensky C minor Trio and the masterpiece Shostakovich composed just over two decades after his first essay in the format, is the winged delivery of the Korean sisters Soo-Jin (violin) and Soo-Kyung Hong (cello) with the latter's husband, Danish pianist Jens Elvekjaer. The later Shostakovich trio isn't the usual hard-hitter, at least until we come to the holocaust of Jewish themes at the finale's heart; the scherzo is fast and light, though with sudden shocks from the swelling grimaces, and in both outer movements the astonishing sophistication of these players registers in split-second drop-backs to *pianissimo*.

Just as Shostakovich brings back his slow-movement chords at a late stage in the finale, so Arensky recalls the radiance at the heart of his *Adagio* before bringing back his opening lament. From the way these visions are so ethereally delivered here, you get the sense that the recently deceased cellist Carl Davydov meant as much to Arensky as musicologist and polymath Ivan Sollertinsky did to Shostakovich. The lyric inspiration really flows, with the rich but never over-resonant acoustic of the Royal Danish Academy of Music Concert Hall giving space to each player's special beauty of tone. While I've heard performances of Arensky's work before which didn't engrave it on the memory, the Copenhagen trio truly make it live. I won't forget this disc.

The rich acoustic gives space to the players' special beauty of tone

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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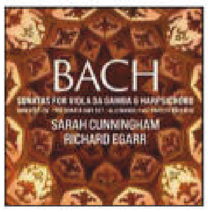
JS Bach

Sonatas for Viola da Gamba and Harpsichord, BWV 1027-1029; Trio Sonata, BWV 527; Partita in A minor, BWV 1013 – Allemande
Sarah Cunningham (viola da gamba), Richard Egarr (harpsichord)
Avie AV2491 63:16 mins



Only the first of Bach's three Sonatas for viola da gamba and harpsichord survives in his own manuscript, and it is not known when he may have composed them. And while Sonata No. 1 in G, BWV 127 and No. 2 in D, BWV 1028 are laid out in typical four-movement trio-sonata form – slow-fast-slow-fast – No. 3 in G minor, BWV 1029 suggests a grander three-movement concerto; one could easily imagine its vigorous opening movement transcribed for a Brandenburg Concerto-like ensemble. Indeed, the middle movement of the Organ Trio Sonata No. 3 in D minor, BWV 527, which Sarah Cunningham has convincingly transcribed to make a fourth viola da gamba sonata, was duly recycled by Bach himself in his Triple Concerto, BWV 1044.

What unifies these four sonatas is their strict three-part contrapuntal texture – the chordal propensities of the viola da gamba are barely touched on. Closely miked, this new recording achieves a pleasing balance and integration of texture, with Cunningham carefully differentiating between leading and subsidiary passages in her part, and Richard Egarr choosing well-contrasted timbres for his upper and lower lines. He plays, as ever, with understanding and vital rhythm and, while Cunningham may not quite run to the eloquent rhetoric of Laurence Dreyfus (on Simax) or the latent romanticism of Jordi Savall (on Alia Vox) in their respective recordings of this music, her great experience is conveyed in many a subtler nuance. Even more so in her plangently lingering account of her transcription of the Allemande from Bach's Flute Partita which serves as encore.
Bayan Northcott

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Bartók

String Quartets Nos 3, 5 & 6

Ragazze Quartet

Channel Classics CCS42421 75:48 mins

The Ragazze Quartet from the Netherlands has been devoting its attention over the last five years to a project called *Bartók Bound*, of which this is the second instalment. Bringing together the Third, Fifth and Sixth of the Hungarian composer's string quartet cycle, they have chosen a fine way to group the works, emphasising their contrasts. No. 3 is in many ways the most uncompromising of them all, years ahead of its time (1927), while the relatively expansive and folk-influenced Nos 5 and 6 from the late 1930s belie the troubling political developments that would soon send Bartók into exile in the US.

After their well-received account of the other three quartets, the Ragazze don't disappoint with this follow-up. Whether in the whispered, unearthly textures of No. 3 or the dug-in rhythms and fierce embellishments at the opening of No. 5, many are the moments in which the Ragazze players slalom their way splendidly from challenge to challenge, with the tension strongly sustained and the ensemble well unified, breathing as one. The recorded sound is clear and close.

The Bartók cycle has of course been extensively recorded, and the Ragazze's accounts need perhaps an extra edge of virtuoso drive and sheer sonic charisma if they are to hold their own beside the likes of the Takács or Emerson quartets. Still, their sheer passion, energy and commitment make for satisfying performances. *Jessica Duchen*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Beethoven

String Quartets: No. 12 in E flat, Op. 127; No. 14 in C sharp minor, Op. 131

Ehnes Quartet

Onyx Classics ONYX 4215 50:19 mins

If Beethoven prized Op. 131 highly he wasn't alone – Schubert, Schumann and Wagner queued up to heap praise. And together with Op. 127 which broke a quartet silence of some 15 years, both works are the latest additions to the Ehnes's ongoing project of recording late Beethoven quartets. Its virtues are by now well-rehearsed: ringing tonal opulence and fastidious balance are at the service of readings manifestly intelligent and often hugely compelling.

At the same time, though, the polish and 'finish' sometimes works against the spirit of struggle that spikes the transcendental elements; and some of the protean drama is under-observed. Take the opening of Op. 127. The Takács Quartet (Decca) imbue the *Maestoso* introduction with more presence, the chords instinct with brooding tension. And the Ehnes's exert such a powerfully incisive grip on the *Scherzo* that some of its Puckishness is lost. Indeed their precision can be a little too controlling generally, especially when Beethoven slips into quasi-recitative mood. The brief connecting passage into Op. 131's fourth movement is a touch brusque – though when they land, the theme and variations are ravishingly navigated.

Variations seem to suit the Ehnes's because Op. 127's set unfolds in a serenely spacious place – James Ehnes, himself, 'singing' particularly sweetly in the E major *Adagio molto espressivo*. Ensembles such as the Busch, Hungarian or Lindsay quartets are not afraid to break a sweat in these late masterpieces; the Ehnes's sometimes sound as if they still have something in reserve. Op. 131's Finale, however, trenchant and judiciously calibrated, rounds off an absorbing disc with resounding authority. *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Virtuous viewpoint: the Ehnes Quartet is fastidious and polished in Beethoven

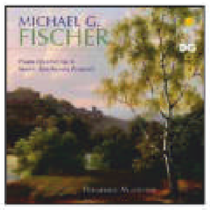
NIKOLAJ LUND, KIDUCK KIM

Beethoven • MG Fischer

Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 (arr. MG Fischer);
MG Fischer: Piano Quartet

Parnassus Academy

MDG MDG6032221 67:39 mins



Michael Gotthard Fischer's detailed and glowing review of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony appeared in the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* on 17 January 1810 – barely more than 12 months after the work's Viennese premiere. Fischer was himself a successful organist and composer, and before the year was out he had made his own arrangement of the *Pastoral* for what was then the unusual ensemble of a string sextet. The transcription is carried out with considerable skill, but inevitably it can't convey the splendour of Beethoven's orchestral tapestry, with its waves of sound repeated over and over again in different colours. The 'Scene by the Brook' suffers particularly in this respect (and its woodwind calls of nightingale, cuckoo and quail sound a good deal less evocative when played on strings), but the stamping rhythms of the peasants' merrymaking and the drama and intensity of the storm also lose out in the chamber version. The members of the Parnassus Akademie throw themselves into the venture with commendable enthusiasm, but its historical and musical interests remain rather slight.

More compelling is Fischer's own Piano Quartet Op. 6. The music perhaps verges on the sentimental at times, not least in the slow introduction to the opening movement, but it's always deeply expressive, turning from major to minor at every opportunity. Particularly fine are the slow movement's two minor-key episodes, and the elaborately ornamented reprises of its main theme. The Parnassus Akademie again acquits itself very well, with its pianist Johann Blanchard making a commanding contribution. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Robert Fuchs • Kornauth

Kornauth: Violin Sonata;
Robert Fuchs: Fantasy Pieces; Violin Sonata No. 3

Litton Duo

BIS BIS-2574 (CD/SACD) 75:45 mins

Compared to its lustrous-toned violin and cello cousins, the viola's more subtle and shadowy sound meant that before the mid-20th century, composers of solo chamber music tended to pass it by. That said, Vienna had (and very much still has) a fabulous string-playing tradition and culture, and the works featured here were part of that situation. The best, by far, is Robert Fuchs's Sonata of 1909.

A celebrated teacher in Vienna of Mahler, Wolf, Sibelius and Korngold among others, Fuchs seems to have been content to compose within the fairly conservative boundaries exemplified by Brahms and Schumann. His Sonata has an unpretentious melodic appeal and quality that are something more than merely Brahms-lite; the *Fantasy Pieces*, however, written in 1927 in the composer's 80th year, amount to little beyond a restrospective gaze towards the distant era of Schumann and Mendelssohn. The 21-year-old Egon Kornauth's Sonata, too, composed in 1912, is a beautifully written post-Brahms statement with little evidence, as yet, of an individual creative voice.

Katharina Kang Litton's playing avoids the turbocharged tone of some of today's more famous soloists in favour of an unexaggerated poise and musicianship that's a pleasure in its own right; it also relates to the kind of sonority that composers of Fuchs's and Kornauth's Viennese era would surely have expected, and been familiar with. Andrew Litton's accompaniments, too, are mellifluous and supportive.
Malcolm Hayes

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Korngold

String Quartets Nos 2 & 3
Alma Quartet
Challenge Classics CC 72869 49:35 mins

Hot on the heels of the Eusebius Quartet's magnificent performance of Korngold's String Quartet No. 2, here is another, from an excellent and go-ahead Dutch ensemble. The pairing this time is the very different Quartet No. 3.

This is a so-called 'direct to disc' recording: the pieces are played straight through in a studio, unedited, to simulate the freshness and adrenaline-rush of a live concert. While there are small technical glitches here and there, it largely succeeds; so, too, does the group's 'storytelling' approach to the works in hand. Their interpretation of No. 2 has a wonderful delicacy and intimacy, with a vivid sense of characterisation that pays dividends in moments like the autumnally Brahmsy intermezzo and the final waltz. Their conversational playing offers a sense of easy, natural ensemble and they meet technical challenges with aplomb.

No. 3 has previously attracted somewhat less attention, being an altogether bleaker and edgier work. This is post-exile, post-Hollywood Korngold, rife with disillusionment and not far removed from his Symphony in F sharp: a genial, romantic soul adrift in an overturned world. As in his Symphony, the slow movement is perhaps the strongest, introverted and aching with loneliness. Shock, horror, it is based on some of his film music – and it sounds fantastic. The Alma Quartet approaches the work's astringency and brittleness with just as much sympathy and imagination as they bring to No. 2's Viennese *schwung*. *Jessica Duchen*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Sympathetic storytellers: the Alma Quartet is imaginative in Korngold

Schubert

String Quartets: No. 12 in C minor 'Quartettsatz' (completed by B Newbould); No. 15 in G
Fitzwilliam String Quartet
Linn Records CKD 673 74:18 mins

This intriguing recording opens with the ominous rumble of Schubert's *Quartettsatz*, a movement which was unpublished in Schubert's lifetime, and first performed nearly 40 years after his death. It has remained a repertoire favourite ever since. Here, it's paired with Brian Newbould's sympathetic completion of the corresponding – and, sadly, less interesting – *Andante*.

The Fitzwilliams lead us into a world of turmoil with the mighty String Quartet in G major. They craft a hugely imaginative soundscape, enjoying the rough scrape of bow on string as much as the teasing out of narrow, eerie timbres and the singing of heartfelt melodies. The freely unfolding opening hints at the adventures to follow. However, this is not fully sustained. The *Andante* lacks a little richness and its sprawling trajectory needs more direction. The *Scherzo* could be more dramatic and robust, although I enjoyed its introvert un-hastiness. The closing *Allegro* recaptured some of the energy lost during the inner movements.

The players offer insightful contributions in their liner note, telling us they're playing 'upgraded 18th-century Italian masterpieces' strung with 19th-century Viennese-style thick gut, alongside other fascinating details of their approach.

This is an original, often compelling performance. These musicians seamlessly integrate historically informed techniques such as an attractive portamento (sliding between notes) into their playing. Vibrato is meted out sparingly, resulting in an occasional whininess, and some moments of uneasy intonation. Still, there's some impressive control of Schubert's lengthy forms, some spine-chilling quiet playing and silvery, shimmering tremolos, the whole held together by excellent recording quality. *Natasha Loges*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Horn Quintets

Beethoven: Horn Quintet, Op. 17 (arr. Comberti); **R Holloway:** Horn Quintet, Op. 135; **Mozart:** Horn Quintet, K407; **Seabourne:** Fall
Ondřej Vrabec (horn); Pavel Bořkovec Quartet
Sheva Contemporary SH281 71:40 mins

Following Ondřej Vrabec's recording of solo and ensemble horn works by English composers Peter Seabourne (b1960) and Robin Holloway (b1943), here are the quintets they wrote for him. Vrabec's detailed and committed performances here do them proud.

Seabourne's *Fall* is rhythmically lively in three of its four movements, but often evasive in pulse, and variety tends to come from changing textures. Real feeling emerges in the slow movement, with a soaring horn line over searing harmonies and the occasional sound of birdsong in high harmonics.

Holloway's Horn Quintet is more straightforward, on the surface at any rate, with a strong tonal pull, although not always quite in the foreseen direction, and melodies don't always end up where you expect, although their development is logical and economic. As so often with Holloway, there are elusive echoes of earlier composers, but this is an accomplished work by someone at the top of his game.

In the arrangement of Beethoven's Op. 17 Sonata, the strings give extra colour to the music, starting with their response to the striking opening horn call. They're also able to match the soloist in sustaining a line, especially effective in the brief *Andante* and the final spirited Rondo, although ensemble could sometimes be tidier.

That's less of an issue in the Mozart Quintet: phrasing is tighter, especially in the outer movements, and the strings have a pleasing blend and coherence. The substitution of a viola for the second violin gives a warmer sound overall, and Vrabec spins a long line in the song-like *Andante*, despite a few inelegant trills. In all, an unusual and enjoyable programme.
Martin Cotton

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

From Brighton to Brooklyn

Works by Beach, Bridge, Britten, Coleridge-Taylor, Copland, Price and Schoenfeld
Elena Urioste (violin), Tom Poster (piano)
Chandos CHAN 20248 71:29 mins

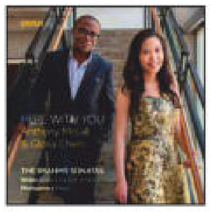
Married couple Elena Urioste (American) and Tom Poster (British) arranged this recital as a demonstration of their love for the music of each others' country. Perhaps this idea looked cute on paper, though it would still need a stronger selection of music to bring this album anywhere near essential listening. There are certainly some attractive moments: I'd single out their treatment of Copland's delicately bluesy Nocturne, first of his early *Two Pieces*, written in Paris in 1926. Frank Bridge's *Cradle Song*, high-grade salon music, is also attractive, while Florence Price's lightly humorous *Elfentanz* should please anyone who appreciates dancing elves.

All these pieces have simple textures, with lyricism dominant. But when textures get busier and crowded, Urioste's violin can be hard to hear, as in parts of Paul Schoenfeld's *Four Souvenirs* of 1990. At least its hectic final square dance is a winner; not so the third movement, a supine pastiche of old-time Tin Pan Alley. Elsewhere, the pair fail to make a case for the scrawny kind of grotesquerie found in Britten's Op. 6, while Bridge's other salon pieces, and three more by Amy Beach, are the kind of music that glides past the ears without ever penetrating. Poster's playing, tidy and muscular, survives the selection of pieces quite well, but aside from the billowing phrases of Coleridge-Taylor's *Ballade*, Urioste's usually lustrous tone and romantic soul can't find much of an outlet in this lightweight transatlantic parade.
Geoff Brown

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Here With You

Brahms: Clarinet Sonata Nos 1 & 2; **Jesse Montgomery:** Peace; **Weber:** Grand Duo Concertant
Anthony McGill (clarinet), Gloria Chien (piano)
Cedille CDR 90000 207 67:15 mins



Jessie Montgomery's *Peace* is a pandemic work. But don't let that dreaded word put you off. This brief and haunting work, infused with the atmosphere of an unsettled dream, speaks beyond current circumstances. It is, writes the American composer, about making peace with sadness. And this is already *Peace*'s second recording, after the original violin-and-piano version appeared on Elena Urioste and Tom Poster's *The Jukebox Album* (Orchid Classics). Heard here in a version for clarinet and piano, *Peace* is infused with the atmosphere of an unsettled dream and played with sheer poise by clarinettist Anthony McGill and pianist Gloria Chien.

The Montgomery work is an emotional pivot, too, taking us from bittersweet Brahms to joyful Weber. There are plenty of recordings of Brahms's two clarinet sonatas, written during the unexpected blossoming in the autumn of his career, but this one has a lovely warmth. McGill and Chien have long been musical partners, and a sense of deep connection in their playing. It's a shame the piano doesn't have more gleam or sound more forward in the recording, but McGill's sound is pure eloquence. It brings to mind Brahms's description of the playing of Richard Mühlfeld, the clarinettist who inspired these pieces: 'the nightingale of the orchestra'.

Weber also had a particular clarinettist in mind when he was writing his Grand Duo Concertant in E flat. Heinrich Baermann was principal clarinet of the Munich Court Orchestra, and judging by the demands of this piece, quite the virtuoso. McGill tackles it with aplomb and exhilarating skill.
Rebecca Franks

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Peace and joy: Anthony McGill and Gloria Chien make some eloquent pairings

JAN WILLEM GROEN, PHILIP GREENBERG

Un violon à Paris

Works by JS Bach, Chaplin, Chopin, Debussy, Grappelli, Korngold, Kreisler, Massenet, Schubert, Schumann et al
Renaud Capuçon (violin), Guillaume Bellom (piano)
Erato 9029652001 80:13 mins

During France's first lockdown in 2020, violinist Renaud Capuçon and pianist Guillaume Bellom got together via the miracles of modern technology and performed a different piece on social media every day in order to help raise music lovers' spirits around the world. This in turn inspired the present album, a 22-strong collection of predominately reflective miniature arrangements ranging from Schubert's 'Ständchen' and the Aria from Bach's Third Orchestral Suite to Chaplin's 'Smile' (from *Modern Times*) and 'O mio babbino caro' from Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*.

Once upon a time, the prevailing tendency with such items was to give it all you've got – to pack about as much tonal luxuriance, nonchalant brilliance, interpretative suavity and emotional resonance as one could into a piece lasting around three minutes. Interestingly, the results were often more revealing about the various players musical proclivities than their bread-and-butter, mainstream repertoire.

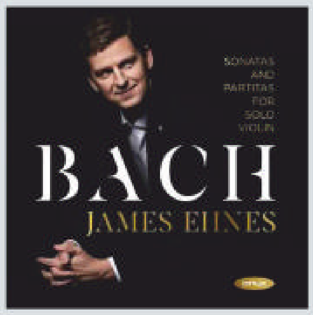
Capuçon accordingly produces an elegantly sustained, warm sound, inflected by a medium-paced, medium-width vibrato, and phrases everything to exquisite perfection. Where he parts company with the general tendency is the touching intimacy he and Bellom create, a million miles away from the concert-hall projection normally favoured in material of this type.

Compared to the near hysteria often whipped up in Massenet's 'Méditation', for example, they tantalise the senses by never overstating the obvious. Some may prefer something a little more hot-blooded in this repertoire, yet taken on its terms this is one of the most radiantly beautiful violin albums of recent years. *Julian Haylock*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Instrumental

INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE



Masterful solo Bach from James Ehnes

Jan Smaczny applauds the violinist's expressive yet commanding accounts

JS Bach

Solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas
James Ehnes (violin)
Onyx ONYX4228 141:43 mins (2 discs)

Bach's astonishing versatility as a composer is abundantly evident throughout his career. Two periods, however, stand out: his 27 years in Leipzig during which he wrote his finest choral music, not least the *St John* and *St Matthew Passion* settings, and his six years as court musician to Prince Leopold of Cöthen, a time which was arguably the happiest and most creatively satisfying of his life. Devoting himself principally to instrumental music, among much else Bach produced the six *Brandenburg Concertos* as well as some of his greatest solo works for harpsichord, violin and cello.

While outwardly conventional in form, the impeccable neatness of the six Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin frames some of the most emotionally rewarding music of the early 18th century. Among the finest and most versatile of today's violinists, James Ehnes's approach to these demanding works matches a superb command of form with an expressive richness in interpretative detail, not least in the Second Partita's famous concluding Chaconne. Ehnes constantly holds the listener's attention with closely-observed detail, notably in the first Sonata's opening *Adagio* and 'Sicilliana', balanced by infectious excitement in the *Presto* from the same sonata and the ebullient Prelude to the Third Partita. The more modest dance movements have both elegance and an attractive sense of 'discovery'.

> These performances are among the finest available

Just occasionally in the fugal movements, notably those of Sonatas Nos 1 and 3, Ehnes adopts a rather more didactic approach which can seem a little severe, but overall these excellently-recorded performances are among the finest available.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Bach in expert hands: James Ehnes holds his listeners' attention

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CPE Bach – *Sonatas & Rondos*

Sonatas – H31, H66, H173, H247, H281, H286; Rondos – H265, H267, H272, H274, H283; Fantasies – H291, H300; Arioso with 9 variations etc
Marc-André Hamelin (piano)
Hyperion CDA68381/2
136:51 mins (2 discs)

CPE Bach may have emerged from behind his father's shadow over the last two decades, but despite his prolific output – 400 solo sonatas, fantasias, fugues and sets of variations – his musical style remains hard to characterise.

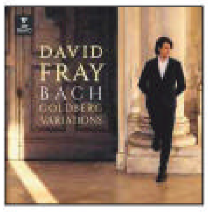
In a learned liner note for Marc-André Hamelin's new album, Mahan Esfahani does his best to identify CPE's achievement, if not his style. That achievement, says Esfahani, was best embodied in his *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, which Haydn dubbed the 'school of schools' and which Beethoven used in teaching his ablest pupils. Straddling the transition from the harpsichord to the piano, CPE Bach showed the way forward to a new instrumental sensibility, cultivating a new expressive language in a style which appealed to cognoscenti and amateur alike. Using a modern piano, Marc-André Hamelin delivers 50 tracks to brilliantly illustrate that argument, in an exploration of the composer's own exploration of possible effects.

In the early works we hear the influence of Handel and JS Bach, but once he got going Carl Philipp Emanuel went his own way, giving his mercurial instincts free rein. He loved to spring surprises; one of his trademarks is a series of short phrases, each ending in a brusquely virtuosic ornamental flourish. The downside is that a typical CPE Bach piece may come over as a one-trick pony: once you've heard the first 30 seconds, you can predict exactly how the next two minutes will pan out. But at his best CPE wrote some lovely works: try the F sharp minor *Fantasie* written in his penultimate year, and his farewell to a beloved instrument, *Abschied von meinem Silbermannischen Claviere in einem Rondo*. *Michael Church*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

JS Bach

Goldberg Variations
David Fray (piano)
Erato 9029660691 87:30 mins



David Fray sees the *Goldberg Variations* as an eternal cycle in which all times merge into one, and the manner in which he makes the final reprise of the opening Aria emerge out of the preceding

‘Quodlibet’, as though from afar, is certainly striking. It’s just one very personal touch in what is a highly subjective view of Bach’s great work. Fray’s tempos are very much on the slow side – not least in the Aria itself, and its even more lingering da capo at the end – and his altogether romanticised account makes liberal use of the sustaining pedal and doesn’t shy away from rubato. Fray’s approach pays some dividends: the famous 25th variation, forming the work’s expressive high-point, is very movingly played, and elsewhere Fray sometimes teases out hidden inner melodic lines. But all too often he seems to be trying to read too much into the music. Variation 7, for instance, is essentially a gigue, but there is nothing dance-like about Fray’s contemplative and poeticised performance; and Variation 19 – a straightforward piece in constant semiquavers – is again curiously contemplative.

Some of the variations undergo a complete character change in midstream: the French Overture which marks the work’s mid-point suddenly becomes slow and ruminative half way through its majestic opening section; and the minor-mode canon of Variation 21 also shifts in mood as it proceeds. I’ve admired this pianist’s Schubert in the past, but I find it hard to keep him company on his journey through Bach’s synoptic masterpiece. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas, Vol. 1: No. 8, Op. 13 ‘Pathetique’; Nos 9-10, Op. 14/1 & 2; No. 13, Op. 27/1
Daniel Heide (piano)
CAvi-music AVI 8553326 64:45 mins

Daniel Heide has made his reputation as a song accompanist and chamber pianist, but time at home during the pandemic led him to return to his roots. He first got to know the Beethoven Piano Sonatas as a child through his musician mother. Red leather-bound volumes of the sonatas were on the sitting room shelf, along with LPs of Maurizio Pollini and Wilhelm Kempff’s Beethoven. As he grew up, he got to know recordings by others: Walter Gieseking, Edwin Fischer, Wilhelm Backhaus. Returning to the sonatas in 2020, Heide immersed himself in their world again. This is his first solo recording.

The result is beautiful. Recorded on a Bösendorfer, in Schloss Ettersburg in Weimar, the sound is clear and warm. Heide begins his programme with the Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 14/2, the first sonata he ever learned as a child. It unfolds with a winning simplicity and lyricism and introduces the luminous quality that also infuses the following sonata, No. 13 in E flat major, Op. 27/1. Here, though, moments of turbulence remain restrained; the emphasis on beauty comes at a cost.

By now, it’s clear that Heide tends to understatement, a trait that continues in Sonata No. 9 in E major, Op. 14/1. The Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13 makes clear his preference for clarity and perfection over character and personality, and in this dramatic work that feels frustrating. Still, Heide’s love and affection for the composer always comes through, and I’d certainly want to hear another volume. *Rebecca Franks*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Breathtaking pianism: Bruce Liu shows why he deserved to win in Warsaw last year

Chopin

Andante spinato & Grande Polonaise; Mazurkas, Op. 33; Etudes, Op. 10 – excerpts; Nocturnes – selection etc
Bruce Liu (piano)
DG 486 1555 60:17 mins

Bruce Liu’s name had been on many people’s lips as the 18th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition progressed in Warsaw last autumn, but if there was a single moment when his win looked likely it was illustrated by the ovation that greeted the Variations in B flat, Op. 2, at the close of his Third Stage recital. Chopin’s brilliant elaborations on Mozart’s ‘Là ci darem’ drew a performance that was poetic and virtuosic in equal measure — fundamental, one might say, to great Chopin playing. That work and this playful interpretation round off a release from Deutsche Grammophon showcasing the competition’s first prize winner, and should convince anyone who wasn’t there that even in this most distinguished of contests Liu deserved his place.

In performances captured across much of the three-week competition, the Canadian pianist has something consistently interesting and always fully idiomatic to say about Chopin’s music. The disc opens with an *Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise Brillante* of uncommon sensitivity. Liu brings fresh pathos to his set of Mazurkas, Op. 33, opening with playing of breathtaking beauty; the third piece, in D major, has rumbustious energy and melody of the fourth, in B minor, glistens as if in the dew. Featuring in quick succession two Etudes, a Nocturne and a Waltz, the programme might sound bitty were it not for his sophisticated playing. But the more substantial *Scherzo* No. 4 in E major gives Liu scope for architectural shape in what is by any measure a very satisfying Chopin recital. *John Allison*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Mendelssohn

Songs Without Words, Vol. 1: Rondo capriccioso, Op. 14; Trois fantaisies ou Caprices, Op. 16; Songs Without Words – selection
Peter Donohoe (piano)
Chandos CHAN 20252 79:56 mins

Hearing Mendelssohn play the piano in 1839, *The Times* critic Henry Chorley noted that his expressive style ‘required not the garnishing of trills and appoggiature, or the aid of changes of time’, while Sir George Grove, of dictionary fame, quoted the composer as saying of *ritardandos* at the ends of pieces, ‘they think it expression, but it is sheer affectation’. Elsewhere Grove makes it clear that ‘rubatophiles’ were already in good supply in his day as in ours, and that as a result Mendelssohn could be thought unusual. Peter Donohoe is far from being extreme in this area, but this

BENJAMIN EALOVEGA, WOJCIECH GRZEDZINSKI

The passions of youth: Stephen Hough in the colourful late 1980s

From the archives

Andrew McGregor reacquaints himself with a younger Stephen Hough thanks to a new collection from Erato

What was your first Stephen Hough recording? Mine was a Liszt recital for Virgin from 1987, where he's pictured sitting backwards on the piano stool, outstretched arms covering the keyboard. And I can still remember my delight at the delicacy, intimacy and gentle radiance of the playing. No virtuosic showboating – Liszt as pure poetry in his *Bénediction* and *St Francis preaching to the birds*. Special playing, and a musical maturity beyond Hough's 26 years. ***Stephen Hough: The Erato Years 1987-1998*** (*Erato 9029672918; 9CDs*) is more than a glimpse of things to come – 'An Italian Recital' of Liszt followed four years later, in a reading that manages to be sensuous as well as sulphurous. The two 'Piano Albums' offer encores and album leaves from a previous age of great pianists – Paderewski, Friedman, Rosenthal and Godowsky, as well as Hough's own arrangements of Rodgers and Quilter.

Two favourite Mozart Concertos with Bryden Thomson and the Hallé, the *Jeunehomme* and *Elvira Madigan*, are played with elegance and self-effacing simplicity. Contrast with the two Brahms Concertos with Andrew Davis and the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1989; there's power and passion here, the muscular virtuosity they need, but also the sensuous lyricism that seems to desert some pianists when tackling the huge demands of these Romantic masterpieces. But I prefer Hough's 2013 recordings with Mark Wigglesworth in Salzburg because there's a more rewarding conversation with the orchestra. His recent Hyperion recording of Schumann shows him to be better attuned to the subtly disturbing duality of emotions than he was in the 1980s, but Britten's *Holiday Diary* and music for two pianos is full of delights.

I wonder what he would make of his younger self? I hope he'd be as happy to meet him as I've been; an intellectually curious, serious, passionate pianist, well on the way to becoming the consummate artist we admire today. No hats yet. Give it 30 years.

BBC RADIO 3 90–93FM

Andrew McGregor is the presenter of Radio 3's *Record Review*, broadcast each Saturday morning from 9am until 11.45am

recording, containing the *Rondo capriccioso* and the three *Fantaisies* Op. 16 as well as a selection of 24 *Songs without Words*, does contain enough unmarked tempo changes to be at times irritating.

Yet more so are the unmarked pauses, most notably in the third *Fantaisie* where Donohoe interpolates a long one between a *fortissimo* and a *pianissimo*: are we listeners all such snowflakes these days that we feel Mendelssohn's clear intention for one to run up against the other as offensive?

Technically, of course, Donohoe is absolutely secure, as well as generously displaying the love of this music that he mentions in his note. I was sad therefore, my hopes being raised on seeing that the final piece is the *Duetto*, to find that here, of all places, his affection lapses and Mendelssohn's magical stream, as well as being too loud, is strewn with rocks. *Roger Nichols*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Vladigerov

Impressions; Bulgarian Suite; Prelude, Op. 15/1
Etsuko Hirose (piano)
Mirare MIR 600 78:33 mins

While it can't be said that many of us have been waiting impatiently for recordings of music by Bulgaria's No. 1 composer, Pancho Vladigerov, it's still good news that two have come along within a relatively short space of time. Etsuko Hirose's choice ranges wider than Nadejda Vlaeva's (on Hyperion, reviewed last August); both include all ten *Impressions* from 1920, but Hirose has the edge by offsetting them against the *Bulgarian Suite* of 1926, where the proud C major 'Alla marcia' and the 5/4 and 7/4 elements show us the proud nationalist rather than the impressionistic cosmopolitan. Vlaeva has a mercurial touch better suited to the chronicle of a love affair, the Gershwin/Hollywood improvisational feel, while Hirose emphasises the Scriabin influence and taps the emotional depth for the elegiac end of a romance.

I learnt much, too, from Hirose's well-researched note, telling us among other things that the composer's mother was Russian-Jewish – Shostakovich raved about his *Jewish Poem* of 1950, that his twin brother was a distinguished violinist and that Max Reinhardt, for whose Berlin theatre Vladigerov wrote incidental music, wanted him to go to America with him. The composer's fate would have been very different – he survived the Second World War in Bulgaria – and his output maybe less diverse. *David Nice*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Time Traveler's Suite

Brahms: Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24; **plus works by Adès, JS Bach, Barber, Handel, Ligeti, Rameau and Ravel**
Inon Barnatan (piano)
Pentatone PTC 5186 874 63:25 mins

Time travelling is something the period performance movement has been trying to do for decades, albeit with the aid of electric lighting and modern heating. Inon Barnatan's brand of time travel, spanning four centuries and several cities, involves a 'suite' of seemingly disparate pieces, but each in fact united by some element of the Baroque form. And, an obvious point perhaps, all performed on the same modern piano (a Steinway? Alas, he doesn't say).

We start with youthful Bach and movements from suites by Handel, Rameau and Couperin, before we're steered towards Ravel's 'Rigaudon' from *Tombeau de Couperin* which owes so much to 18th-century dance. Barnatan plays with delightful alertness of phrasing and his ornamentation is sublimely executed. Some musical transitions work better than others, and I did wonder whether all of the Baroque works needed to be bunched at the start. But Adès's haunting *Blanca Variations* (from his opera *The Exterminating Angel*) steeped in Baroque excess, were a revelation, providing a smooth passage to the Ligeti which in turn melts beautifully into the rollicking Barber fugue that serves as something of a final gigue.

To my ears this momentum is broken by the recording's 'Part II': the Brahms *Handel Variations* presented in full. It's wonderfully played, full of verve and wit – so no arguments there – although it dominates to

ARENA PAL, MICHEL RESTANY

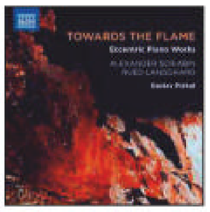
Emotional depth: pianist Etsuko Hirose plays Vladigerov

the extent that the previous 35 or so minutes of music fade somewhat in the memory, which is a shame. Still, I love the concept, and anything that can so effectively and seamlessly bring old and new together is very welcome. *Oliver Condy*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Toward the Flame
– Eccentric Piano Works

Scriabin: 3 Pieces, Op. 45; Piano Sonatas Nos 9 & 10; Vers la flamme, Op. 72; **Langgaard:** Sponsa Christi taedium vitae; Music of the Abyss; The Flame Chambers
Gustav Piekut (piano)
Naxos 8.574312 56:15 mins



Notwithstanding the album's subtitle, works by Scriabin and Langgaard do not sound particularly left-field to 21st-century ears, yet in their time they bemused as much as they thrilled. Scriabin in particular garnered a dedicated following among composers such as Kaikhosru Sorabji and Philip Heseltine (Peter Warlock), who discussed his repertoire during their extended correspondence.

In *Towards the Flame*, Gustav Piekut focuses on the spiritual side of Scriabin and Langgaard, both of whom were fascinated by mysticism and religion. (Somewhat simplified in the title by a singular link to fire – Langgaard's *The Flame Chambers* and Scriabin's *Vers la flamme*.) This is Piekut's second recording following an impressive reading of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*. The Danish pianist takes a Chopinesque view of Scrabin's Tenth Sonata; liquid passages are interrupted by extended trills – Piekut hits the sweet spot between technical accuracy and off-the-cuff brilliance. The Ninth Sonata is Scrabin's darkest; Piekut is an excellent guide through dangerous open waters.

Lesser-known than his Russian contemporary, Danish composer Rued Langgaard's harmonic language is loosely comparable. *Sponsa Christi taedium vitae* intersperses a reverant, chord-like motif with a moment of unhinged euphoria – Piekut is glorious in the unexpected glissando. This foreshadows the more dramatic *Music of the Abyss*, based on apocalyptic visions depicted in the *Book of Revelation*. This is, to my knowledge, the first time Scriabin has been paired with Langgaard on disc – it works well. *Claire Jackson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

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Brief notes

Our selection this month includes perspectives, reflections and a welcome party

Matthew Aucoin
The Orphic Moment etc
American Modern Opera Company
BMOP Sound BMOP1084

Across two discs and seven works, we're introduced to the music of American composer Matthew Aucoin (b1990). It's quite the intro. Whether working with the voice, instrumentalists or full orchestra, Aucoin paints a dazzling musical picture. Now I want to hear more. (MB) ★★★★★

Bob Chilcott Circlesong
Houston Chamber Choir
Signum Classics SIGCD703

Circlesong is a choral work packed full of fun, with vibrant, dynamic sections alongside more reflective, ethereal moments. Placed alongside a series of shorter pieces by the contemporary composer here, there's plenty to enjoy. (FP) ★★★★

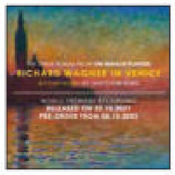
Debussy Préludes Book 2; Children's Corner; L'Isle joyeuse
Vanessa Benelli Mosell (piano)
Decca 485 6859

Vanessa Benelli Mosell brings quite an aggressive approach to these works, with some surprisingly rapid tempos too. Not always a bad thing, though there are moments where it would be nice to be allowed to relax and breathe in Debussy's perfumed air a little more. (JP) ★★★

Cevanne Horrocks-Hopayian
Welcome Party
Trish Clowes (sax); members of the London Symphony Orchestra
NMC NMCD268

Inspired by the composer's time in residence at LSO Soundhub, this collection of works is wide-ranging, dynamic and utterly unique. The album encompasses acoustic and electronic textures, eastern and western influences and plenty of percussive fun. (FP) ★★★★

Matthew King • Wagner
Richard Wagner in Venice; Siegfried Idyll
The Mahler Players/Tomas Leakey
Mahler Players MP 1383CD

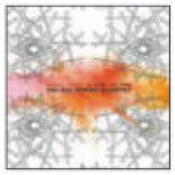


This debut album from the Scottish ensemble offers up a Wagner classic and a new work based on some of his unfinished late sketches. Presented against the *Siegfried Idyll*, Matthew King's effort feels authentic and the performance by this group of intrepid Highlanders is robust. (MB) ★★★

Steve Reich Electric Counterpoint; Electric Guitar Phase etc
Pierre Bibault (guitar)
Indésens INDE 154

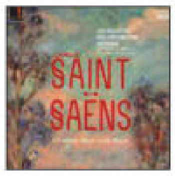
To celebrate Reich's 85th birthday, the rarely recorded *Electric Guitar Phase* is sandwiched between the ever-popular *Clapping Music* and *Electric Counterpoint*. Despite a few lapses in perfect phrasing, the overall effect is smooth and transportive. (FP) ★★★

Huang Ruo A Dust in Time
Sol Deo Quartet
Bright Shiny Things BSTC-0158



The CD release of this comes with a colouring book of mandalas to complete while listening. So the message, then, is mindfulness and the music certainly soothes. Unfurling and receding across a non-stop 60 minutes, it's really rather captivating. (MB) ★★★

Saint-Saëns Chamber Works
Les Solistes de l'Orchestre de Paris
Indésens INDE149

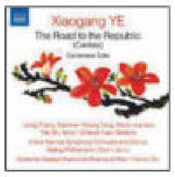


This double disc of Saint-Saëns chamber music is a thorough guide to the composer's writing for wind instruments. 'The Swan' from *The Carnival of the Animals* played on contrabassoon is stunning – a really enlightening transcription. (FP) ★★★★

Schubert Winterreise
James Rutherford (baritone), Eugene Asti (piano)
BIS BIS-2410

It's difficult to make any *Winterreise* recording stand out against the current competition, but James Rutherford's rich baritone grabs attention. Schubert's song cycle has been transposed a minor third down to accommodate the warmth of his voice in a well-balanced interpretation. (FP) ★★★★

Xiaogang Ye The Road to the Republic; Cantonese Suite
Chinese National Symphony Orchestra
Naxos 8.579089

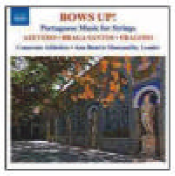


Distinctive and dramatic, *The Road to the Republic* is a big-boned choral work in which western orchestral forces and chorus rub shoulders with Chinese instruments and a children's choir. The folk-inspired *Cantonese Suite* is an altogether easier-going beast. (JP) ★★★

Aigua Works by Takemitsu, Françaix, Brouwer et al
Cordas et Bentu Duo
Stradivarius STR37187

There's plenty of dexterous playing in this selection of works dedicated to this flute and guitar duo's home country of Sardinia. From Takemitsu to Castelnuovo-Tedesco, this programme is well considered and delivered, if at moments a little breathy. (FP) ★★★

Bows Up!
Portuguese Music for Strings
Camerata Atlantica
Naxos 8.579105

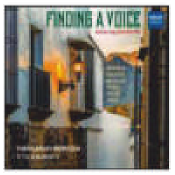


Braga Santos's Concerto for Strings has the feel of Vaughan Williams, while glimpses of the subject of Sérgio Azevedo's *Music for Strings (In memoriam Béla Bartók)* can also be heard in Azevedo's other works. Earthy, energetic playing. (JP) ★★★★

Family Works by Mozart, Vivaldi, Thomas Newman et al
Olga Scheps (piano)
Sony Classical 19439875852

Unless you're building a playlist, it's not often you find music by Hans Zimmer and Thomas Newman snuggled up with Vivaldi, Mozart and Haydn. Scheps's programme works, though, as she takes us by the hand through her heartwarming, joyous and occasionally emotional selection. (MB) ★★★★

Finding a Voice Mexican Song Cycles After 1920
Juan Carlos Mendoza (tenor), Jessica Monnier (piano)
MSR Classics MS1772



Though tenor Juan Carlos Mendoza occasionally sounds as if he is pushing his voice to its limits – there are rough edges here and there – this is an enjoyable introduction to the world of Mexican song, mournful though much of it is inclined to be. (JP) ★★★

Letter To Kamilla
Music in Jewish Memory
Mosaic Voices
Chandos CHAN 20261

Jewish choral music, ranging from centuries past to contemporary compositions, is deftly arranged for five voices and sung with power and passion. The story behind the penultimate song, 'Letter from Kamilla', is simply heartbreaking. (JP) ★★★★

Perspectives Works by Caplet, Hindemith, Britten and Holliger
Anaëlle Tourret (harp)
Es Dur ES DUR 2085

A superbly played showcase that, from eerie Holliger to light-fingered Britten and reflective Hindemith, shows how much more there is to the harp than the floaty, ripply soundworld it is so often accorded. (JP) ★★★★★

GETTY

Reflections **Works by Nico Muhly, Evelyn Glennie et al**
Bristol Ensemble et al
Sound World 505980 6296136

Thanks to Sound World's crowdfunding project, the UK's leading composers contributed works to the Bristol Ensemble during the pandemic. The blending and individual instrumental lines could be cleaner, but these new works are vibrant and engaging. (FP) ★★★

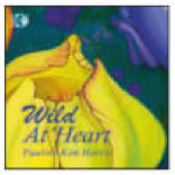
The Sound and the Fury **Works by Dvořák, Grieg, and Janáček**
Shea-Kim Duo
Blue Griffin BGR593

A beautiful programme of violin and piano works performed with great energy by the Shea-Kin Duo in what is their first studio album. The close recording creates a rich and intimate atmosphere, as they navigate the thrills and spills of Janáček and Grieg plus Dvořák's colourful *Mazurek*. (MB) ★★★★

Transatlantic **Works by Stravinsky, Takemitsu et al**
Berlin Academy of American Music/ Garrett Keast et al
Onyx Classics ONYX4223

A celebration of the love affair enjoyed between composers and America, this is a winning collection of works which demands repeated listening. Craig Urquhart's *Lamentation for Flute and Orchestra* is devastatingly beautiful, while Takemitsu's *Toward the Sea II* captivates. (MB) ★★★★★

Wild at Heart **Works by Annie Gosfield, Elizabeth Hoffmann, Yoon-Ji Lee and John King**
Pauline Kim Harris (violin)
Sono Luminus DSL-92253



Part of Harris's ongoing 'Chaconne Project', this album sees four composers reimagining (or 'reincarnating') Bach's original for solo violin. Extended techniques abound and Harris is really put through her paces. For the listener, it's an often heady, frenetic soundworld. (MB) ★★★

Reviewers: *Michael Beek* ***(MB),*** *Freya Parr* ***(FP),*** *Jeremy Pound* ***(JP)***

The month in box-sets

Musical adventures: Yo-Yo Ma crosses borders in a new set

Musical journeys and Spanish classics

This month's round-up also features a clutch of post-war Erich Kleiber

There's a real glow about ***The Spanish Soul*** *(Warner Classics 9029653730)*, an 11-disc celebration of the music of Manuel de Falla. It's a deep dive into the composer's legacy from classics to discoveries. Two discs are devoted to historical recordings and we get to hear the man himself at the keyboard in the likes of *El amor brujo* and the *Siete canciones*. There are stars aplenty here, too, with turns from David Oistrakh, Jacqueline du Pré, Brodsky Quartet, Daniel Hope and Alison Balsom, to name a few.

It's a deep dive into Falla's legacy from classics to discoveries

Cellist Yo-Yo Ma can always be relied upon to deliver memorable performances and eclectic programmes. In ***Crossing Borders – A Musical Journey*** *(Sony Classical 19439916202)* the label gathers together the very best of his wide-ranging explorations in music on nine discs. Classic albums such as *Appalachian Journey* and *Soul of the Tango* find fitting bedfellows in Ma's *Silkroad Journey* and *Hush*, the latter famously featuring Bobby McFerrin. It's a journey worth taking as the musical adventurer performs everything from jazz to bluegrass.

Croatian pianist Ana-Marija Markovina has spent the last three years on her own journey, through the music of Mendelssohn. In ***Complete Works for Piano Solo*** *(Hänssler Classic PH18043)*, all of Markovina's recordings – made 2018-21 – are presented together across 12 discs. It's an exhaustive account, and what it lacks in presentation (thanks to the set's budget-feel) it certainly makes up for in Markovina's insightful and thoroughly researched music-making.

There's nothing budget, and something brilliantly steely, about the artwork for ***Erich Kleiber – Complete Decca Recordings*** *(Decca 485 1582)*. It's fitting really, given the conductor's no-nonsense reputation on the podium during the 1930s, '40s and '50s. This 15-disc set takes in post-war recordings of meaty works – from Beethoven and Tchaikovsky symphonies to a Mozart opera – as recorded with fine ensembles such as the London and Vienna Philharmonics and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. Polish, precision and power are all present and correct here.

Jazz

This month *Roger Thomas* finds several new albums which push the envelope

JAZZ CHOICE

A unique partnership

Ayumi Tanaka and her Trio's elusive and aphoristic style strikes gold in their new album

Suggestive jazz: Tanaka with fellow arists Svendsen and Johansen

Ayumi Tanaka Trio

Subaqueous Silence
Ayumi Tanaka (piano),
Christian Meaas Svendsen (double bass),
Per Oddvar Johansen (drums)
ECM 384 2912

If there's some kind of fantastical Venn diagram involving Monk, the Wandelweiser Group and Morton Feldman, then her first album as leader for ECM demonstrates that pianist Ayumi Tanaka, whose rarefied approach to the instrument is a perfect fit for label founder Manfred Eicher's production style, surely belongs in the overlap. Sparse, subtle and determined as much by silence as by sound, hers is a music created using deft, fleeting strokes, resulting in uncluttered, cryptic musical statements that for the most part are simply allowed to hang in the air, their context implied rather than stated. The intriguing thing is that there's a genuine jazz sensibility at work here, but conveyed as if by a hypnotist's power of suggestion rather than by forthright assertion. This set of short, aphoristic pieces will delight anyone already familiar with her work and fascinate willing and receptive newcomers. Svendsen and Johansen are the most empathetic of partners, their instruments frequently repurposed as timbral adjuncts to Tanaka's unique musical thinking. ★★★★★

PERNILLE SANDBERG, ROG WALKER

February round-up

This month's Jazz Choice is followed by two other piano-led recordings that are as unlike it as they are unlike each other. It's never a bad idea to listen to whatever's new from American musician

Bob James, and the self-explanatory ***Feel Like Making LIVE!*** is no exception. Apart from being a fine player who famously abandoned his avant-garde roots to become a leading exponent of the mainstream, James is also among the surprisingly few pianists to have mastered the idiosyncrasies of the original electro-acoustic Fender Rhodes piano. This is very much in evidence on this live-in-the-studio trio collection that stirs a few standards and covers into a fine mixture of catalogue pieces. *(Evo Sound EVSA 834M)* ★★★★★

Jools Holland is also a doyen of the mainstream in a somewhat different way. ***Pianola: Piano & Friends*** is a well-intentioned collection of collaborations with, it has to be said, an impressive transgeneric who's who of associates ranging from Lang Lang to Ruby Turner. The overall quality of this mish-mash is somewhat erratic, but its scrapbook-like nature should be regarded as part of its charm. The album mixes originals, contributions, borrowings and standards with gleeful abandon and should probably be listened to in much the same spirit. *(Rhino 346676)* ★★★

Elsewhere, the jazz-by-default category is very much alive and well in that if listening to a programme of, say, Maggie Nicols, Cathy Berberian and Hildegard Westerkamp would make perfect aesthetic sense to you – and there's every reason why it should – you really need to add British vocalist ***Brigitte Beraha***'s ***By the Cobbled Path*** to such a list. Alluded to when she was interviewed in these pages last year, it's essentially a sonic art album created mainly from overdubbed and processed vocal tracks and is an absolute joy from beginning to end. Thematically it contains everything from quirky personal observation to imaginative conjecture,

while sonically it avoids gratuitous pyrotechnics in favour of a kind of tour-de-douceur that's both engaging and communicative. *(Let Me Out LMOCD002)* ★★★★★

Finally, a couple of saxophone-led ensemble discs that also subtly push the envelope in their own ways. British bandleader ***Kevin Figes*** avows that the compositions on ***Wallpaper Music*** are influenced by the likes of Karlheinz Stockhausen and Luciano Berio and, interestingly, legendary art-rockers Henry Cow, a band that frequently interacted with the sharper end of jazz in its day. Interesting things can spin off from such benevolently recursive loops and they certainly do here, with the vaguely mid-European, Eisleresque elements being particularly effective. Brigitte Beraha, whose latest album was highlighted earlier, also happens to feature as vocalist here with good results, alongside a lively and onside rhythm section. *(Pig Records P11)* ★★★★

British tenor saxophonist ***Mark Lockheart***'s ***Dreamers*** deploys similar instrumentation and also draws on a wide range of improbable influences – Lockheart himself puckishly cites Kraftwerk and Burt Bacharach among others, which is surely enough to be getting on with – to create a very lively set of original pieces, full of jumpy zig-zag avant-chamberish arrangements and spiky instrumental lines that never quite go where you expect them. The sound of surprise is still with us. *(Edition EDN1195)* ★★★★

TAKE FIVE

An interview with today's finest jazz musicians

This month: Immanuel Wilkins

The declamatory sound of young Philadelphian alto saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins was a powerful therapeutic for jazz lovers during lockdown. Wilkins burst onto the scene in 2020 with a quartet recording on Blue Note, *Omega*, that explored the wild borderlands of post-bop and free jazz.

The 24 year-old grew up hearing Blue Note records featuring altoists like Jackie McLean and Cannonball Adderley at home with parents who encouraged him to play by enrolling him in local programmes like the Clef Club of Jazz & Performing Arts. Wilkins explains: 'The Clef was founded by members of Local No. 274, Philadelphia's African American musicians' union. It provides old school mentorship and takes younger musicians under their wing – a lot of my growth came from there.'

> 'The Black avant garde is an opportunity for the listener to practise empathy'

Wilkins gained attention as a sideman while still studying at New York's Juilliard School, playing with diverse artists from Wynton Marsalis to Bob Dylan. But his new album as leader, *The Seventh Hand*, sees him exploring free improvisation as a means of describing the Black experience in America. The seven movements combine a hymn-like fervour with more contemplative interludes. He says he's always been interested in the avant garde. 'Song X' by Ornette Coleman and the late Coltrane piece 'Offering' were reference points for the new album's climax: 'I wanted to create a similar rolling ball of energy that you hear in those two pieces.'

As he explains, the Black avant garde has multiple coded levels where the meaning is under the surface, discoverable to those who can hear the message amid the dissonance: 'It's like speaking in tongues in church. It's also an opportunity for the listener to practise empathy.'

Looking into the future, Wilkins is contemplating bringing together singers, dancers or other soloists to explore the traditional music of West Africa with his quartet. Before that, there's a gruelling 20-date European tour coming up in March: 'It will be intense but the band's rapport is super special – and we're all young.' ***Garry Booth***

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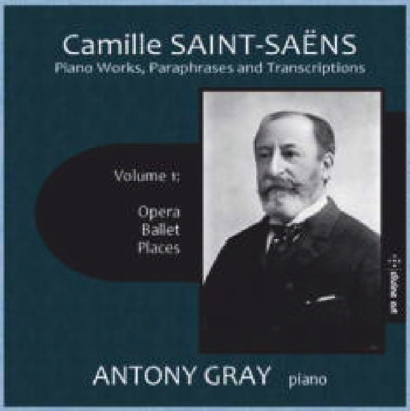

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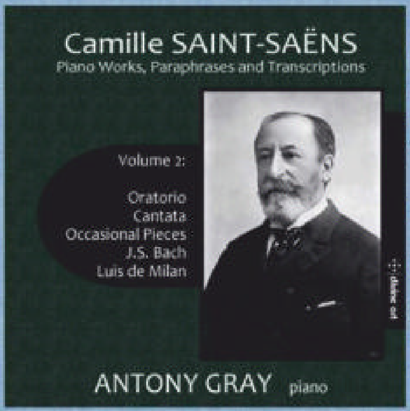

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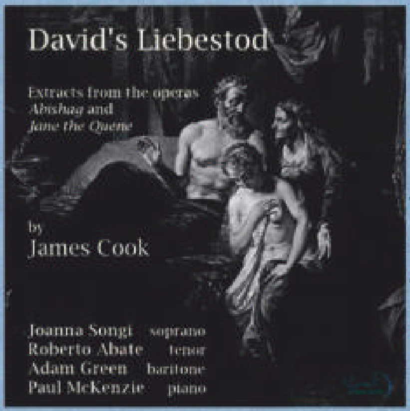

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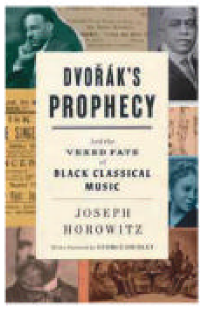
Books

Our critics cast their eyes over this month's selection of books on classical music

Dvořák's Prophecy – And the Vexed Fate of Black Classical Music
Joseph Horowitz

WW Norton 256pp (hb) £23.99

In 1893 Dvořák declared: 'In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music'. Joseph Horowitz dashes this hope in his opening paragraph. The 'Black musical motherlode', he states, settled into popular music instead, while American classical music 'stayed white'. To explain why, he usefully looks sideways (Charles Ives comes paired with Mark Twain) and avoids heavy academic artillery. Instead, he writes with a journalist's fondness for reportage, short sentences and plenty of long quotes. This is both good and bad.

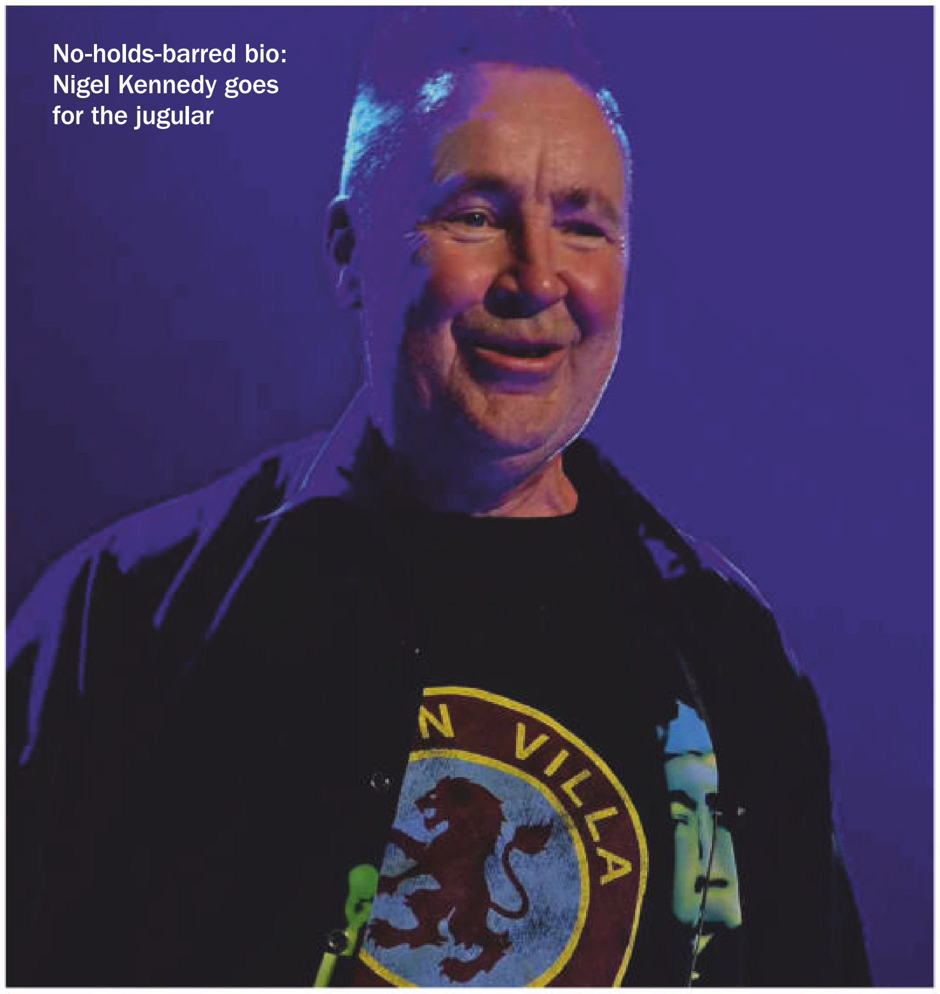


Horowitz's admiration for composers who tried to fulfil Dvořák's prophecy is clear. So is his frustration with a musical culture characterised as quick to prettify ethnic elements and forget its past. Both positions lead him to exaggerate. I'm not denying Florence Price's significance, but does her well-behaved music truly demonstrate 'vernacular grit'? And are Copland, Bernstein and Virgil Thomson really the 20th century's bad guys? Such exuberances don't negate the argument's importance; but they do make you wish for an end product that wasn't so much like a newspaper article greatly enlarged. *Geoff Brown* ★★★

Five Straight Lines – A History of Music
Andrew Gant

Profile Books 608pp (hb) £30

If you're searching for a comprehensive, engaging, hyper-informative history of classical music, look no further. Andrew Gant's encyclopaedic knowledge of his subject is seasoned and assimilated; his book has an instinctive sense of values that makes it a genuine history, not just

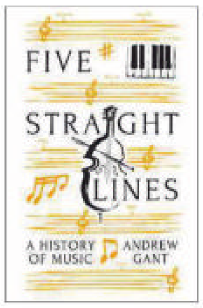


No-holds-barred bio: Nigel Kennedy goes for the jugular

GETTY

a compendium of research. His writing style is concise and can be entertaining (as in the description of Weber's chaotic early career).

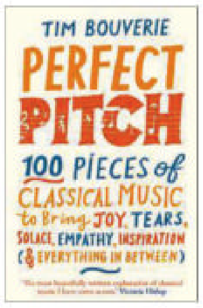
Gant is excellent on the technical and spiritual intricacies of medieval and Renaissance music. He finds ways of avoiding shopping-list syndrome: the musical lives of Haydn and Mozart are intercut in a way that works very well. JS Bach gets just three pages, yet they beautifully encapsulate the vastness of his achievements. There's a gift for analogy: the opening of Wagner's *Parsifal* prelude is 'orchestrated like a sky painted by JMW Turner'. The necessarily brisker gallop through the 20th century's multiple musical styles and riches (jazz and rock included) extends up to present-day talents like Errollyn Wallen, whose quoted words summarise the book itself: 'We don't break down barriers in music; we don't see any.' *Malcolm Hayes* ★★★★★



Perfect Pitch – 100 Pieces of Classical Music...
Tim Bouverie

Short Books 208pp (hb) £9.99

As historian Tim Bouverie points out in his introduction, this is a personal selection of 100 pieces intended to whet the appetite of those new or fairly new to the world of classical music. Born out of lockdown, when Bouverie invited friends and family to submit their musical favourites, to make the final cut each work needed to possess that magical 'x factor' that moves the listener profoundly, whether it be to laughter or tears – and, 'everything in between'.

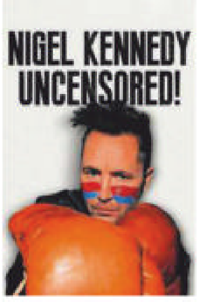


The earliest piece here is Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, the latest Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs*, and everything else also falls broadly within the tonal system. There is nothing one could take serious exception to – in fact, the only left-of-field item is Louise Farrenc's enchanting First Piano Quintet. Each piece carries a well-chosen recommended recording and usefully a link is provided to an accompanying playlist on Spotify. Yet the main reason for investing in this handy little volume is Bouverie's effortlessly fluent prose, and spot-on judgements. He describes the epic slow finale of Mahler's Third Symphony, for example, as having 'a strong claim to be the most profoundly beautiful slow movement ever written' – absolutely! *Julian Haylock* ★★★★

Uncensored!
Nigel Kennedy

Fonthill Media 320pp (hb) £25

The opening to Nigel Kennedy's autobiography is unorthodox. 'Being 64, the way I often express myself could be considered to be politically incorrect by today's thought police', he warns. Readers of *Uncensored!* will likely conclude that this expression probably has nothing to do with Kennedy's age and everything to do with his distinctive personality. Having been whisked off to play for Yehudi Menuhin, the young Kennedy was installed at the great violinist's new school, described as 'a mixture of Gormenghast and Hogwarts'. Kennedy remains respectful of his mentor while also alluding to their differences in opinion (particularly over the Beethoven Concerto). Others don't fare so well: Kennedy takes aim at the BBC, EMI and Greta Thunberg. The stream-of-consciousness style adds authenticity, and some of the offshoots are deliciously bizarre (the chapter about his grandfather – who played the cello with Nellie Melba – is written as though the senior Kennedy is channelling himself through Nigel). The glossary is necessary, as the text is written in vernacular Kennedy. Although presumably most readers can work out what a 'K**tducktor' is... *Claire Jackson* ★★★★



Our expert *Chris Haslam* gives valuable advice on buying and using your hi-fi

How to get the best sound from your computer

We recommend...

Audioengine A2+ £259

Impressively compact, stylish and loaded with features, these 60W desktop speakers have a quality DAC built in and can connect via 3.5mm, USB, RCA socket or Bluetooth. **amazon.co.uk**

Grado SR325x £330

Being open backed, these wired headphones leak sound – not great for a shared office – but in your workspace at home, they offer a remarkably detailed, articulate and joyously entertaining listen. **grado.co.uk**

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Prepare for a huge audio upgrade with this ESS Sabre desktop DAC. It can play digital audio files up to 32bit/768kHz and connect to most audio sources, including Bluetooth, while sounding phenomenal. **cambridgeaudio.com**

Compact desk: Ruark's MR1 Mk2 speakers produce quality sound

Most of us spend a disproportionately large amount of time in front of a computer. There's the nine-to-five, the online searching, reading, shopping and binge-watching, but one thing many music lovers forget is the fact your laptop has the power to be a high-quality music system.

Yes, your computer may have woeful built-in speakers, but with a few simple upgrades you can enjoy audiophile quality hi-res recordings. If you don't need to worry about disturbing co-workers, a pair of desktop speakers will let your computer sing. Ruark's superb-value MR1 Mk2 (**ruarkaudio.com**; £349) connects over your computer's Bluetooth, optical or 3.5mm inputs. Alternatively, KEF's all-in-one LSX (**kef.com**; £999) offers wireless hi-res streaming support and sensational performance.

Unlike many smartphones, most computers and laptops still have a 3.5mm socket, which gives you the chance to plug in and enjoy a really good pair of wired over-ear headphones. Your computer's built-in DAC (digital analogue converter) might not be brilliant – more on that below – but quality headphones from brands such as Audeze, Audio Technica and Grado will pull out as much detail as possible from whatever you're listening to.

> Most computers will allow you to use a really good pair of headphones

Wireless headphones can sound great too – especially if you're in a noisy office and they have active noise cancellation – though audio quality will only ever be as good as the Bluetooth connection. Combining a great pair of wired over-ear headphones with an external DAC or headphone amp is the easiest way to enjoy good quality audio without investing in a high-end hi-fi. There's something for every budget, from the iFi Zen DAC V2 (**ifi-audio.com**; £140) to the desktop Audiolab M-DAC+ (**audiolab.co.uk**; £700) and the class-apart collection from Chord (**chordelectronics.co.uk**) including the £500 Mojo and £1200 Qutest.

The quality of the recordings you're playing will also have an impact on the final sound you hear, with compressed MP3 songs streamed over the internet sounding positively filthy – if you're listening using good headphones and a DAC – compared to a CD-quality or better hi-res recording like FLAC, AAC or MQA. Tidal, Deezer, Qobuz, Amazon and Apple all now offer lossless recordings – with Spotify Hi-Fi also coming soon – but if you had the foresight to burn all your CDs, or download hi-res digital copies to a hard drive, you've got superb-quality recordings ready to play, without the pressure of needing a strong internet connection.

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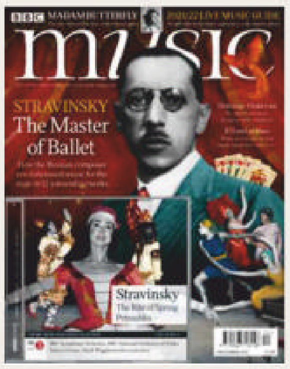

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Live choice

Paul Riley picks the month's best concert and opera highlights in the UK

Triple bill: Barbara Hannigan joins the LSO at the Barbican

MARCO BORGGREVE

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra & Chorus
Lighthouse, Poole, 2 February
Web: *bsolive.com*
After a predominantly Russian start to 2022 the orchestra reaches out to Brahms and two works that deserve to be heard live more often: the Hölderlin-setting *Schicksalslied* and haunting *Alto Rhapsody*. Schuman's *Manfred* Overture establishes the mood, which is lightened by Beethoven's sunny Symphony No. 8. David Hill conducts, and the mezzo soloist is Hanna Hipp.

Irish National Opera
Linbury Theatre, London, 4-12 February
Web: *roh.org.uk*
Directed by Adele Thomas and conducted by baroque specialist Peter Whelan, the Irish company follows up its 2019 production of Vivaldi's *Griselda* with his 1735 tale of love, intrigue and death: *Bajazet*. Gianluca Margheri takes with title role, with James Laing as the conquering Tamerlano.

Orchestra of the Swan
Playhouse, Stratford-upon-Avon, 8 February
Web: *orchestraoftheswan.org*
Michael Collins forgoes his clarinet to conduct an adroit programme that, John Adams aside, forges an Anglo-French *entente cordiale* bookended by Vaughan Williams's *Wasps* Overture and the G major Piano Concerto by his sometime teacher Ravel – an entente compounded by Thomas Adès's *Three Studies from Couperin*. Repeated in Hereford and Cheltenham, the pianist is Peter Donohoe.

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra & Royal Scottish National Orchestra
Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow, 9 February
Web: *glasgowconcerthalls.com*
United under the baton of Kevin John Edusei, the two Glasgow-based orchestras tackle John Adams's dream-inspired triptych *Harmonielehre*. It follows the UK premiere of Canadian conductor-composer Samy Moussa's *Elysium* and, performed by Maria Dueñas, Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1.

Jakub Józef Orliński
Wigmore Hall, London, 10 February
Web: *wigmore-hall.org.uk*
As part of his Wigmore Hall residency, the countertenor teams up with Il Pomo d'Oro under director Francesco Corti as he takes a swerve into relatively little-known sacred music by the likes of Sciassi, Fux and Perez. Instrumental leavening includes works by Dolar, Galuppi and Brescianello.

Manchester Collective
St George's, Bristol, 11 February
Web: *stgeorgesbristol.co.uk*
Configured in its chamber orchestra incarnation, the Collective ponders mortality through two contrasting works: Busoni's *Berceuse élégiaque*, in the arrangement by Schoenberg, and Górecki's enigmatically titled *Kleines Requiem für eine Polka*. Separating them is a shaft of wide-eyed optimism: Copland's *Appalachian Spring*.

Britten Sinfonia
Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden, 11 February
Web: *brittensinfonia.com*
The Sinfonia gets in early with 150th-birthday celebrations for Vaughan Williams, whose Oboe Concerto and *The Lark Ascending* feature Nicholas Daniel and violinist Thomas Gould respectively. Grace Williams, Sibelius, Holst and Bridge lend marine, pastoral and metropolitan support.

Hard Rain SoloistEnsemble
Queen's University, Belfast, 11 February
Web: *hardrainensemble.com*
Northern Ireland's flagship contemporary music ensemble celebrates the centenary of Xenakis's birth with three works of the late 1980s and early '90s, including the solo percussion *Rebonds* and the multi-instrumental *Plektó*. Works by Samantha McCoy and Ailís Ní Ríain feature too (see 'Backstage with…' right).

Theatre of Voices
Kings Place, London, 12 February
Web: *kingsplace.co.uk*
Paul Hillier's renowned Danish ensemble gives the world premiere of a new work by John Luther Adams (see *Composer of the Month*, p60). *A Brief Descent into Deep Time* plunges nearly two billion years through the geology of the Grand Canyon. It is paired with Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's Dowland-infused *Song* and David Lang's *The Little Match Girl Passion*.

BBC Philharmonic
Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, 12 February
Web: *bridgewater-hall.co.uk*
The Ritual Dances from Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage* ensure an ecstatic close to a concert under the orchestra's chief conductor, Omer Meir Wellber. He opens with Hindemith's *Kammermusik I* and gives the UK premiere of Aziza Sadikova's *Marionettes*. The soloist in the Schumann Piano Concerto is Elisó Virsaladze.

Gabrieli Consort & Players
Durham Cathedral, 12 February
Web: *gabrieli.com*
Fruit of the Gabrielis' enterprising 'Roar' programme inspiring youth choirs across the region, some 200 young singers join the Consort, Players and soloists

under director Paul McCreesh for a performance of Haydn's oratorio *The Creation*.

Academy of Ancient Music
West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge, 16 February
Web: *aam.co.uk*
Laurence Cummings and his colleagues hitch a lift with the first Master of the King's Music Nicholas Lanier on his 1625 journey from the Court of Charles I to Venice by way of Antwerp and Milan. Music by Sweelinck, Dowland and Lanier himself is woven around Monteverdi, including *Lamento d'Arianna* and *Tirsi e Clori*.

Budapest Festival Orchestra
Royal Festival Hall, London, 17, 18 February
Web: *southbankcentre.co.uk*
Stravinsky is front and centre in two concerts by conductor Iván Fischer and his Budapest forces. In the first, Patricia Kopatchinskaja is the soloist in the Violin Concerto, which nestles between the ballets *Jeu de Cartes* and *Petrushka*. The second prefaces the *Rite of Spring* with the Concerto in D for strings and *Capriccio* for piano and orchestra.

Psappha
Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, 17 February
Web: *psappha.com*
Over its 30-year existence, Psappha has commissioned works by over 500 composers, and this anniversary season adds 14 world premieres to the tally. One of the most recent – Simon Holt's *The Sower* – sits alongside Harrison Birtwistle, Joanna Ward and Three Études for piano and flowerpots by Ninfea Cruttwell-Reade.

Bachfest
Bath, 17-19 February
Web: *bathbachfest.co.uk*
Framed by Arcangelo and the Academy of Ancient Music, Bath Bachfest delves into three of his greatest motets in the company of Tenebrae. Elsewhere, Chinese traditional music meets Bach in a lunchtime concert by guitarist Xuefei Yang, and a late-morning encounter reunites recorder player Michala Petri and harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani.

London Symphony Orchestra
Barbican, London, 17, 23, 24 February
Web: *barbican.org.uk*
Soprano-conductor Barbara Hannigan is becoming something of an LSO fixture and returns for three concerts. Poulenc's 'telephone opera' *La voix humaine* features singly and in a pairing with Strauss's *Metamorphosen*, while the first concert proposes a lively compilation of Copland, Offenbach and Weill.

BBC National Orchestra of Wales
St David's Hall, Cardiff, 17 February
Web: *stdavidshallcardiff.co.uk*
Conductor Carlos Miguel Prieto is living the multifarious American dream as the Mexican voices of Silvestre Revueltas and Carlos Chávez complement Copland's Symphony No. 3 (symphonic home to the *Fanfare for the Common Man*) and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, in which Daniel Ciobanu is the piano soloist.

English National Opera
Coliseum, London, 18 February – 1 March
Web: *eno.org*
Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* receives a new production from English National Opera's erstwhile Studio Live director Jamie Manton. Sally Matthews is vixen Sharp Ears, with Pumeza Matshikiza as the fox and Lester Lynch as the Forrester. Martyn Brabbins conducts.

Scottish Opera
Theatre Royal, Glasgow, 22-26 February
Web: *scottishopera.org.uk*
Summer might still be some way off, but Scottish Opera is champing at the bit! Conducted by Stuart Stratford and staged by Dominic Hill, Britten's enchanted and enchanting *A Midsummer Night's Dream* casts its spell. Heading the cast as Oberon and Tytania are Lawrence Zazzo and Catriona Hewitson.

Tamara Stefanovich
Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, 27 February
Web: *southbankcentre.co.uk*
Across three recitals performed in a single day, the indefatigable pianist squares up to 20 sonatas spanning the 18th to 20th centuries. The roll call is nothing if not eclectic. With Scarlatti and Soler threaded throughout, Stefanovich steers clear of the usual suspects to embrace, among others, Roslavets, Eisler, Busoni and Ustvolskaya.

BACKSTAGE WITH...
Hard Rain SoloistEnsemble

Greek gifts: Hard Rain SoloistEnsemble celebrates Xenakis's birthday

Your concert on 11 February marks the centenary of Xenakis's birth. How have you chosen which works to play?
Greg Caffrey, artistic director: I had a look at what was already in our repertoire by him, and what was in there was determined by the instrumentation that we have available – we are a pierrot ensemble [based on the instruments in Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*]. Having said that, there is also a thread running through the programme, based on distinctive timbres, that includes the works by the other composers included in it.

What, for you, is the appeal of Xenakis's music?
There probably isn't another composer that sounds like Xenakis – he's a true original. He was someone who thought in a very different way about how music could be assembled, and that had an impact on the sounds he was able to produce. To take as an example *Paille in the wind* for cello and piano, which we are playing in the concert, it's a really unusual piece which tends to use the instruments almost separately and takes a very interesting approach to timbre. It's also really eerie!

And tell us about some of the other works featured…
Raymond Deane, who studied briefly with Xenakis, is one of Ireland's best known composers. Although his *Seachanges* is a hard-hitting piece, it is on the Leaving Cert syllabus for schools in Ireland and so really opens young people's ears as to what music can be. Samantha McCoy, meanwhile, is a recent graduate with an interest in the French spectralists – her *Cai Susah* fits particularly well here. Ailís Ní Ríain's *Consent #7* is written for bass clarinet and bass flute and has a really unique timbre, and the French composer Dominique Lemaître's *Aux Fleurs Plus de Couleur, Plus de Vitesse à l'Onde* is very static, with really delicate textures from beginning to end.

You founded the Hard Rain SoloistEnsemble in Belfast in 2013. How did you decide on the name?
I always struggle to give a satisfactory answer to that – people often think it has something to do with Bob Dylan! In fact, it may have been because at that time I was studying a lot of Takemitsu, and a number his works deal with watery subjects. I think it's a name with a bit of atmosphere to it, though.

TV&Radio

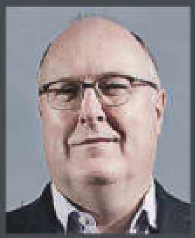
Your complete guide to what's on Radio 3 this month, plus TV highlights

BBC RADIO 3 90–93FM

FEBRUARY'S RADIO 3 LISTINGS

Schedules may be subject to alteration. For up-to-date listings see Radio Times

Three to look out for



Alan Davey, the controller of BBC Radio 3, picks out three great moments to tune into this February

BBC 100

To celebrate the centenary of the BBC, we're showcasing the BBC orchestras and choirs and the Ulster Orchestra across an entire weekend this month. Each ensemble will perform music from the 100-year period, including a newly commissioned work by Thomas Larcher.
11-13 February

Edward Gregson and Alan Bush

Many reputable British composers owe their musical education to Alan Bush, who taught at the Royal Academy of Music for more than 50 years. We'll focus on Bush's music, teaching and political activism, before turning our attention to one of his distinguished students: Edward Gregson.
Composer of the Week: 14-18 February, 12 noon

Classical Fix

Following Clemency Burton-Hill's triumphant return on the Christmas edition of the programme, *Classical Fix* returns to the airwaves – this time presented by Linton Stephens, bassoonist with the Chineke! Orchestra.
Sundays from 13 February, 12am

1 TUESDAY

6.30-9am Breakfast
9am-12noon Essential Classics
12noon-1pm Composer of the Week Elgar
1-2pm Lunchtime Concert
2-5pm Afternoon Concert
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert from the Royal Festival Hall. Poems of Ecstasy. Wagner *Tristan und Isolde: Prelude and Liebestod*, Ravel *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand*, Lili Boulanger *D'un soir triste*, Scriabin *Symphony No. 4 'Le Poème de l'Extase'*. Cédric Tiberghien (piano), London Philharmonic Orchestra/Karina Canellakis
10.00-10.45pm Music Matters
10.45-11pm The Essay
11pm-12.30am Night Tracks

2 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9am Breakfast
9am-12noon Essential Classics
12noon-1pm Composer of the Week Elgar
1-2pm Lunchtime Concert
2-4pm Afternoon Concert
4-5pm Choral Vespers for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord from Our Lady of Victories, Kensington, with Cardinal Vaughan Schola Cantorum
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert from the Barbican. Journey's End. Sibelius *Nightride and Sunrise*, Brett Dean *Piano Concerto: Gneixendorf Music – A Winter's Journey (UK premiere)*, Kaija Saariaho *Vista*, Beethoven arr. Manuel Hidalgo *Grosse Fuge (UK premiere of this arrangement)*. Jonathan Biss (piano), BBC SO/Sakari Oramo
10-10.45pm Feature
10.45-11pm The Essay
11pm-12.30am Night Tracks

3 THURSDAY

6.30am-7.30pm See Tue 1 Feb
7.30-10.45pm Radio 3 in Concert live from City Halls, Glasgow. Korngold *Violin Concerto*, Wagner *Die Meistersinger: an orchestral tribute arr. Henk de Vlieger*. Benjamin Beilman (violin), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/Antony Hermus
10.45-11pm The Essay
11-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

4 FRIDAY

6.30am-2pm See Tue 1 Feb
2-5pm Afternoon Concert
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert live from the Barbican. Mosolov *Iron Foundry (UK premiere)*, Rachmaninov *Piano Concerto No. 4*, *Vespers: VI. Bogoroditse Devo*, Grigorjeva *In Paradisum*, Schnittke *Three Sacred Hymns*, Shostakovich *Symphony No. 2 'To October'*. Marie-Ange Nguci (piano), BBC Symphony Orchestra & Chorus/Dalia Stasevska & Neil Ferris
10-10.45pm Feature
10.45-11pm The Essay
11pm-1am Late Junction

5 SATURDAY

7-9am Breakfast
9-11.45am Record Review
11.45am-12.30pm Music Matters
12.30-1pm This Classical Life
1-3pm Inside Music
3-4pm Sound of Cinema
4-5pm Music Planet
5-6.30pm J to Z
6.30-10pm Opera on 3 Mozart *Don Giovanni*
10pm-12am New Music Show
12-1am Freeness

6 SUNDAY

7-9am Breakfast
9am-12noon Sunday Morning
12noon-1pm Private Passions Barbara Taylor Bradford (author)
1-2pm Lunchtime Concert (rpt)
2-3pm The Early Music Show Mezzo-soprano Ann Hallenberg charts the Baroque chaconne and its journey across the great European cities with lutenist Karl Nyhlin, cellist Mime Brinkmann and harpsichordist Mariangiola Martello
3-4pm Choral Evensong (rpt)
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-5.30pm The Listening Service
5.30-6.45pm Words and Music
6.45-7.30pm Sunday Feature China NW3
7.30-9pm Drama on 3
9-11pm Record Review Extra
11pm-12am Sunday Series
12-12.30am Classical Fix

7 MONDAY

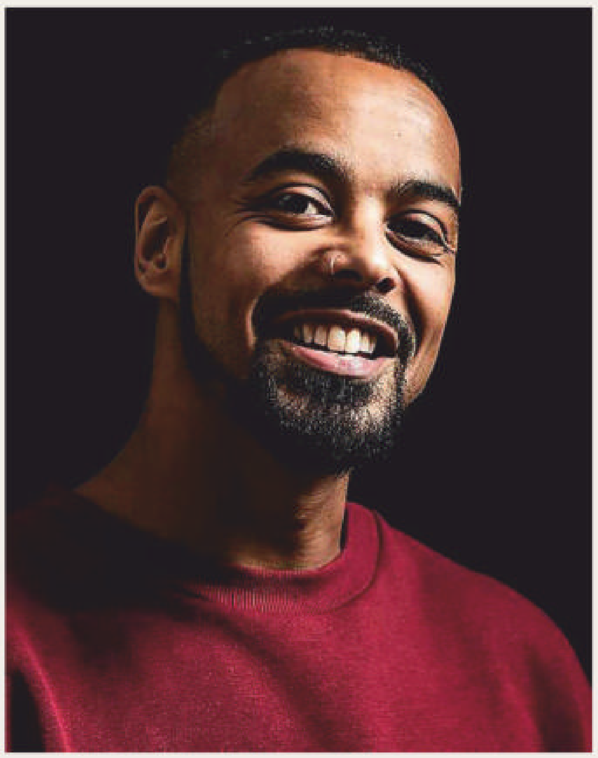
6.30-9am Breakfast
9am-12noon Essential Classics
12noon-1pm Composer of the Week CPE Bach (rpt)
1-2pm Lunchtime Concert
2-4.30pm Afternoon Concert
4.30-5pm New Generation Artists
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert from Tonhalle, St Gallen, Switzerland. Enescu *Decet for winds in D, Op. 14*, Mahler *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, Bruckner *2 Aequali in C minor*, Schoenberg *Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4*. Shea Owens (baritone), St Gallen Symphony Orchestra/Modestas Pitrenas
10-10.45pm Music Matters
10.45-11pm The Essay
11pm-12.30am Northern Drift

8 TUESDAY

6.30am-7.30pm See Mon 7 Feb
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert from Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. Celtic Connections. Ravi Shankar *Sitar Concerto No. 3*. Anoushka Shankar (sitar), Abi Sampa (singer), Amrit Singh (tabla), Rushil (singer), Orchestral Qawwali Project, Scottish Chamber Orchestra
10-11pm See Mon 7 Feb
11pm-12.30am Night Tracks

9 WEDNESDAY

6.30am-2pm See Mon 7 Feb
2-4pm Afternoon Concert
4-5pm Choral Evensong from Winchester Cathedral. Purcell *In God's word will I rejoice*, Grayston Ives *Magdalen Service*, Walker *Lord, thou hast been our refuge*, William Lloyd Webber *Benedictus*. Claudia Grinnell



The best of British: (clockwise) BBC Symphony Orchestra at the BBC Proms; composer Edward Gregson; bassoonist and *Classical Fix* presenter Linton Stephens

GETTY, PHIL PORTUS

(organ), Choir of Winchester Cathedral/Andrew Lumsden
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert live from City Halls, Glasgow. Association of British Orchestras Conference. Samy Moussa *Elysium (UK premiere)*, Shostakovich *Violin Concerto No. 1*, John Adams *Harmonielehre*. María Dueñas (violin), BBC Scottish SO, Royal Scottish National Orchestra/ Kevin John Edusei
10-10.45pm Free Thinking
10.45-11pm The Essay
11pm-12.30am Night Tracks

10 THURSDAY

6.30am-7.30pm See Mon 7 Feb
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert live from the Royal Festival Hall, London. Walton *Violin Concerto*, Elgar *Symphony No. 1*. James Ehnes (violin), Philharmonia/ John Wilson
10-11.30pm See Wed 9 Feb
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

11 FRIDAY

6.30am-7.30pm See Mon 7 Feb
CHOICE 7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert live from the Barbican, London. Bryce Dessner *Mari*, Thomas Larcher *Piano Concerto*, Musorgsky orch. Ravel *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Kirill Gerstein (piano), BBC Symphony Orchestra/Semyon Bychkov
10-10.45pm The Verb
10.45-11pm The Essay
11pm-1am Late Junction

12 SATURDAY

7am-1pm See Sat 5 Feb
1-4pm Radio 3 in Concert live from Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff. Sebastian Hilli *Miracle*, Takemitsu *Fantasma/Cantos*, Grace Williams *Elegy*, Vaughan Williams *Flos Campi*, Ravel *La valse*. Mark Simpson (clarinet), BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales/Ryan Bancroft
4-7.30pm Radio 3 in Concert live from Watford Colosseum. BBC Concert Orchestra/ Anna-Maria Helsing
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert live from Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. Hindemith *Kammermusik No. 1*, Schumann *Piano Concerto*, Aziza Sadikova *Marionettes*, Tippett *Ritual Dances*. BBC Philharmonic/ Omer Meir Wellber
10pm-12am New Music Show
12-1am Free the Music

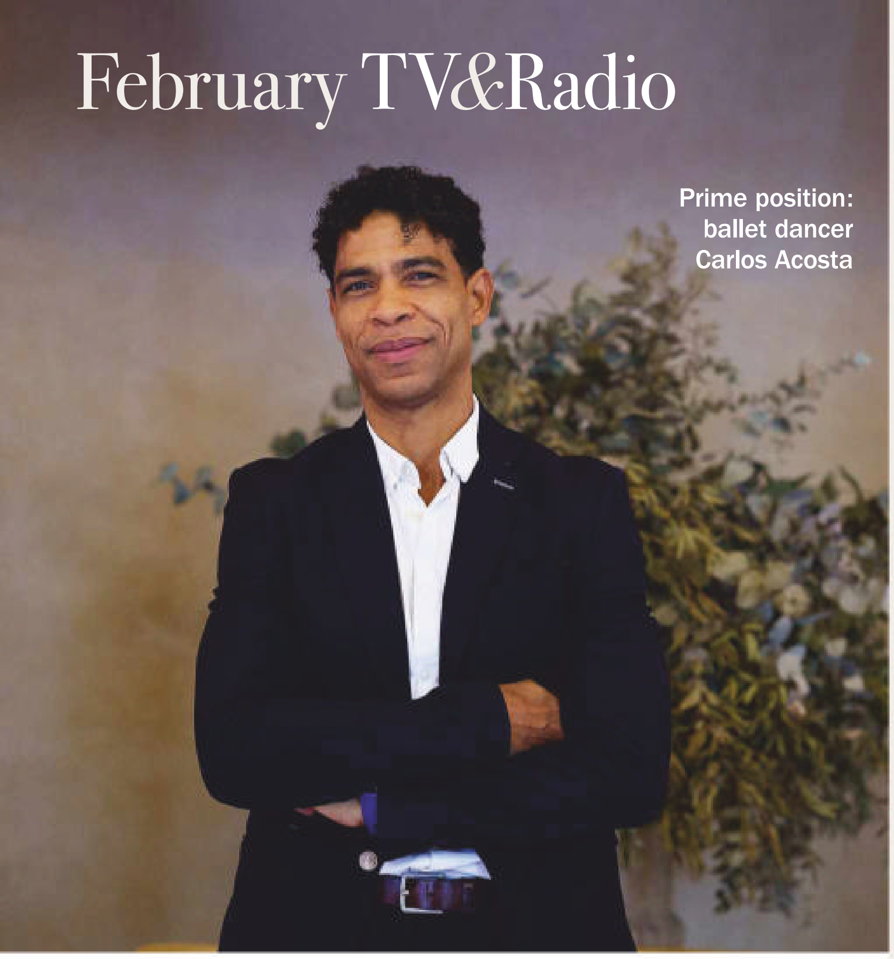
13 SUNDAY

7-9am Breakfast
9am-11am Sunday Morning
11am-12noon Radio 3 in Concert live from Waterfront Hall, Belfast. Ulster Orchestra
12noon-1pm Private Passions Sanjeev Gupta (businessman)
1-2pm Lunchtime Concert (rpt)
2-3pm The Early Music Show What is the Leuven Chansonnier? In 2014, an anonymous-looking 15th-century part-book was sold as part of a Brussels auction. Turns out, it was a lost treasure of early French chanson.
3-4pm Choral Evensong (rpt)
4-6.45pm Radio 3 in Concert live from Milton Court, London. Vaughan Williams *Mass in G minor*, Judith Weir *Love bade me welcome*, Melissa Dunphy *Mourning to dancing*, Roxanna Panufnik *Child of Heaven*, Philip Cooke *Agnus Dei*, Errollyn Wallen *Pace*, Howard Goodall *Unconditional love*, Walford Davies *God be in my head*. BBC Singers/Howard Goodall
6.45-7.30pm Between the Ears Species of Spaces
7.30-9pm Radio 3 in Concert live from City Halls. BBC Scottish SO/Ryan Wigglesworth
9-11pm Record Review Extra
11pm-12am Sunday Series
CHOICE 12-12.30am Classical Fix

14 MONDAY

6.30-9am Breakfast
9am-12noon Essential Classics
CHOICE 12noon-1pm Composer of the Week Edward Gregson/Alan Bush
1-2pm Lunchtime Concert
2-4.30pm Afternoon Concert
4.30-5pm New Generation Artists
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert from Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, Austria. Beethoven *Overture: The Creatures of Prometheus*, Brahms *Double Concerto* Franck *Symphony in D minor*. Kian Soltani (cello), Michael Barenboim (violin), West-Eastern Divan Orchestra/ Daniel Barenboim
10-10.45pm Music Matters
10.45-11pm The Essay Tribal Britain

February TV&Radio


Prime position: ballet dancer Carlos Acosta

TV CHOICE
BBC's Dance Season

To see in the first few months of 2022, BBC Four will turn its attention to the art of dance. The season will be centred around BBC Young Dancer, the biennial competition which sees 16-20 year-olds compete across all dance styles. Previous winners have included street dancer Max Revell and contemporary dancers Connor Scott and Nafisa Baba, who have gone on to study at the country's top dance schools.

The BBC will also broadcast *Firestarter: The Story of Bangarra*, the critically acclaimed documentary about the world-renowned Bangarra Dance Theatre company, one of Australia's top Indigenous performing arts organisations.

Also scheduled as part of the dance season is *Yuli: The Carlos Acosta Story*, the vibrant account of the electrifying Cuban ballet dancer, who started life on the streets of Havana before being dragged along to join the state ballet school by his father.
BBC TV: date and time tbc

11pm-12.30am Northern Drift

15 TUESDAY
6.30am-5pm See Mon 14 Feb
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert from Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool. Brahms *Piano Concerto No. 1*, Tchaikovsky *Symphony No. 6 'Pathétique'*. Stephen Hough (piano), Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Domingo Hindoyan
10-10.45pm Music Matters
10.45-11pm The Essay Tribal Britain
11pm-12.30am Night Tracks

16 WEDNESDAY
6.30am-4pm See Mon 14 Feb
4-5pm Choral Evening Prayer from Buckfast Abbey. Grayston Ives *Psalm 84*, Wingham *The Church of God a Kingdom is*, Leighton *Collegium Magdalenae Oxoniense*, Sheppard *Lord's Prayer*, James MacMillan *A New Song*. Choir of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge/ Matthew Martin
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert Matthew Martin *Lamentations*, Nico Muhly *Recordare, Domine*, Tallis *Lamentations I and II*, Brumel *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, Phinot *Lamentations*. BBC Singers/Peter Phillips
10-10.45pm Free Thinking
10.45-11pm The Essay Tribal Britain
11pm-12.30am Night Tracks

17 THURSDAY
6.30am-5pm See Mon 14 Feb
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert live from St David's Hall, Cardiff. Revueltas *Sensemayá*, Chavez *Sinfonia India*, Gershwin *Rhapsody in Blue*, Copland *Symphony No. 3*. Daniel Ciobanu (piano), BBC National Orchestra of Wales/Carlos Miguel Prieto
10-11.30pm See Wed 16 Feb

18 FRIDAY
6.30am-5pm See Mon 14 Feb
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert live from the Barbican, London. Andrew Davis's Half Century. Berg *Violin Concerto*, Mahler *Symphony No. 10*. James Ehnes (violin), BBC SO/Andrew Davis
10-10.45pm The Verb
10.45-11pm The Essay Tribal Britain
11pm-1am Late Junction

19 SATURDAY
7am-6.30pm See Sat 5 Feb
6.30-10pm Opera on 3 from the Metropolitan Opera. Musorgsky *Boris Godunov*. David Butt Philip (Grigory), Maxim Paster (Shuisky), Aleksey Bogdanov (Shchelkalov), René Pape (Boris Godunov), Ain Anger (Pimen), Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera/Sebastian Weigle
10pm-12am New Music Show
12-1am Free the Music

20 SUNDAY
7-9am Breakfast
9am-12noon Sunday Morning
12noon-1pm Private Passions Kate Bingham (investor)
1-2pm Lunchtime Concert (rpt)
2-3pm The Early Music Show Clare Saloman discusses her recent project exploring the history of the trumpet marine, including recordings taken from the Society of Strange & Ancient Instruments' concert from last year's York Early Music Festival
3-6.45pm See Sun 6 Feb
6.45-7.30pm Sunday Feature Nixon in China
7.30-9pm Drama on 3 The A to Z of Things
9pm-12.30am See Sun 6 Feb

21 MONDAY
6.30-9am Breakfast
9am-12noon Essential Classics
12noon-1pm Composer of the Week Respighi
1-7.30pm See Mon 7 Feb
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert from Stadtcasino, Basel, Switzerland. Beethoven *Symphony No. 4*, Weinberg *Symphony No. 3*. Basel Symphony Orchestra/ Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla
10-10.45pm Music Matters
10.45-11pm The Essay The Well-Tempered Clavier
11pm-12.30am Northern Drift

22 TUESDAY
6.30am-1pm See Mon 21 Feb
1-2pm Lunchtime Concert live from Stoller Hall, Manchester
2-5pm Afternoon Concert
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert from the Barbican, London. Ravel *La valse*, Al Karim *City Scenes (Three Urban Dances)*, Dani Howard *Coalescence*, Rachmaninov *Symphonic Dances*. National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain/ Sian Edwards
10-10.45pm Music Matters
10.45-11pm The Essay The Well-Tempered Clavier
11pm-12.30am Night Tracks

23 WEDNESDAY
6.30am-1pm See Mon 21 Feb
1-2pm Lunchtime Concert
2-4pm Afternoon Concert
4-5pm Choral Evensong live from Bath Abbey
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert from St David's Hall, Cardiff. Kodály *Dances of Galánta*, Dvořák *Cello Concerto*, Brahms *Serenade No. 1*. Johannes Moser (cello), BBC National Orchestra of Wales/Jaime Martín
10-10.45pm Free Thinking
10.45-11pm The Essay The Well-Tempered Clavier
11pm-12.30am Night Tracks

24 THURSDAY
6.30am-5pm See Mon 21 Feb
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert live from Bridgewater Hall. Anna Clyne *This Midnight Hour*, Clara Schumann *Piano Concerto*, Brahms arr. Schoenberg *Piano Quartet No. 25 in G minor*. Isata Kanneh-Mason (piano), Hallé Orchestra/Tianyi Lu
10-11.30pm See Weds 23 Feb
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

25 FRIDAY
6.30am-5pm See Mon 21 Feb
5-7.30pm In Tune plus Mixtape
7.30-10pm Radio 3 in Concert Programme includes works by Tallis, Burton, Sheppard, Stephenson, Victoria, Esmail, Sweelinck etc. BBC Singers
10-10.45pm The Verb
10.45-11pm The Essay The Well-Tempered Clavier
11pm-1am Late Junction

26 SATURDAY
7am-6.30pm See Sat 5 Feb
6.30-10pm Opera on 3 from the Royal Opera House, London. Handel *Theodora*. Julia Bullock (Theodora), Joyce DiDonato (Irene), Jakub Józef Orliński (Didymus), Ed Lyon (Septimus), Orchestra of the Royal Opera House/Harry Bicket
10pm-12am New Music Show
12-1am Free the Music

27 SUNDAY
7-9am Breakfast
9am-12noon Sunday Morning
12noon-1pm Private Passions Theaster Gates (visual artist)
1-2pm Lunchtime Concert (rpt)
2-3pm The Early Music Show Venice and Wine. With some of the region's wine bars dating back to the time of Christopher Columbus, Hannah French explores the sounds of the Floating City's drinking spots
3-6.45pm See Sun 6 Feb
6.45-7.30pm Sunday Feature Marian Anderson
7.30-9pm Drama on 3 The A to Z of Things
9pm-12.30am See Sun 6 Feb

28 MONDAY
6.30-9am Breakfast
9am-12noon Essential Classics
12noon-1pm Composer of the Week Clementi (rpt)
1pm-12.30am See Mon 7 Feb

QUIZ ANSWERS from p104
1. Joseph Haydn
2. Carl Nielsen (the symphony is nicknamed 'The Four Temperaments')
3. Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*
4. Sergei Rachmaninov
5. Henry Purcell
6. a) Israeli; b) Portuguese; c) Mexican; d) Australian
7. Oscar Peterson
8. The oboe
9. Benjamin Britten
10. *Babe*

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GETTY

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THE QUIZ

It's time to put your classical music knowledge to the test...

1. Composed in 1761, whose Symphonies Nos 6, 7 & 8 are nicknamed 'Le matin', 'Le midi' and 'Le soir' ('Morning', 'Noon' and 'Evening')?

2. Inspired by a picture he saw hanging in a pub, which composer's Second Symphony, premiered in 1902, has movements called 'The Choleric', 'The Sanguine', 'The Melancholic' and 'The Phlegmatic'?

3. The action of which opera, premiered on 10 June 1865, begins on a ship to Cornwall and is finally resolved in a castle in Brittany?

4. Which composer was once described by Stravinsky as a 'six-and-a-half-foot scowl'?

5. Who did the 17th-century diarist John Evelyn say was 'esteemed to be the best composer of any Englishman hitherto'?

6. Of which nationality are the following conductors: a) Gisèle Ben-Dor (pictured above); b) Joana Carneiro; c) Alondra de la Parra; d) Simone Young?

7. Which exceptionally gifted jazz pianist was nicknamed 'The Maharaja of the Keyboard'?

8. Conductor Charles Mackerras and composers Ruth Gipps and Arvo Pärt all began their careers playing which instrument in orchestras or military bands?

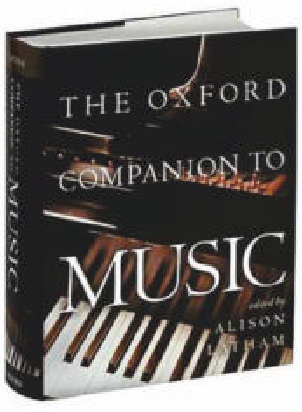
9. Who, in 1976, became the first ever composer to be honoured with a life peerage?

10. As well as having a main theme based on Saint-Saëns's Third Symphony, which 1995 film boasts a score that quotes Delibes, Fauré, Bizet and Grieg?

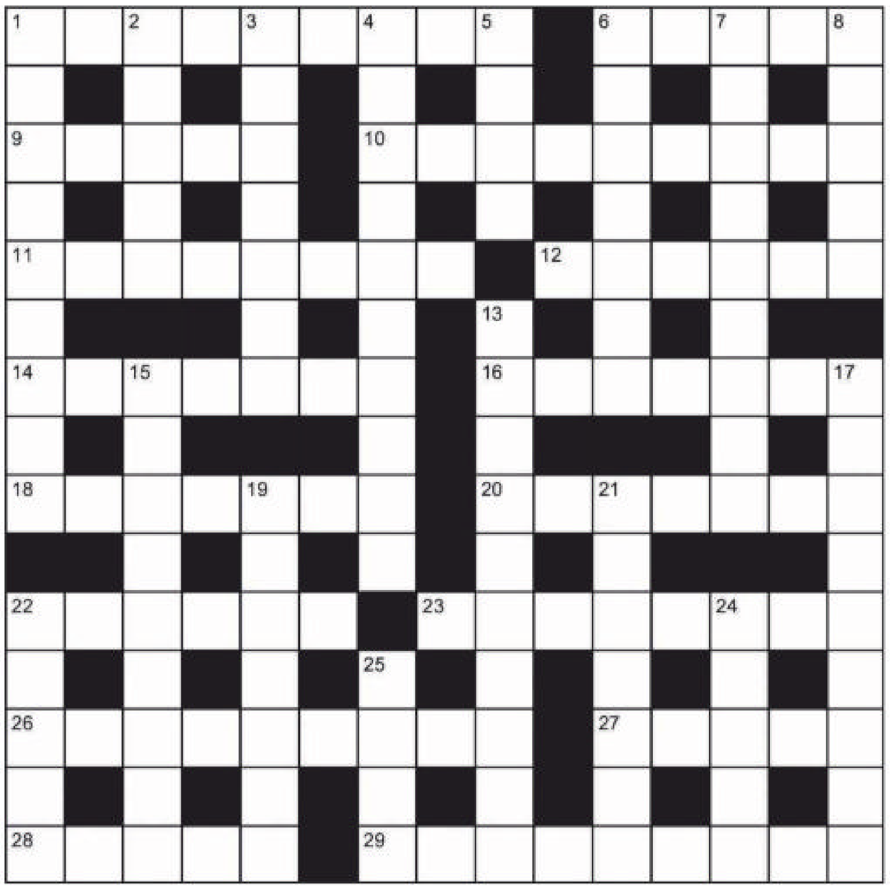
See p102 for answers

The *BBC Music Magazine* PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 369

Crossword set by **Paul Henderson**



The first correct solution of our crossword picked at random will win a copy of **The Oxford Companion to Music.** A runner-up will win **Who Knew? Answers to Questions about Classical Music** (see oup.co.uk). Send answers to: *BBC Music Magazine*, Crossword 369/Feb 2022, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA to arrive by 17 Feb 2022 (solution in May 2022 issue).



Your name & address ....

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ACROSS

1 Girl I caught in US state describing most of the music in this magazine? (9)
6 Dance better presented with some hesitation (5)
9 Operatic café is second source of inspiration? Not entirely (5)
10 Appearances later in movement? Oboe, perhaps, curtailed new attempts (2-7)
11 Non-establishment figure trio used for arrangement (8)
12/18 Soprano nettled Arabia when dancing (6,7)
14 Not supporting a tenor receiving profits (7)
16 See 15 down
18 See 12 across
20 State subject of Kurt Weill song (7)
22/4d Trio dozes vaguely, getting interrupted by contemporary conductor (6,10)
23 Bass tucking into drink, full-flavoured, in Wagner role (8)
26 String player instinctive about one new form of sitar (9)
27 One brought in by nine working to produce Feldman ballet (5)
28 Span round, dropping back of paper, and prepared to play (5)
29 Russian composer and musician refusing to lose heart, meeting broadcaster (9)

DOWN

1 Small role turned up – musical piece needing skill (5,4)
2 Acknowledge a piece by Schubert with German following (5)
3 Sounds picked up around second gathering of jazz players (7)
4 See 22 across
5 German song gave a false impression (4)
6 Old string instrument – it's adopted by church and English navy (7)
7 Respighi cantata, in a version presented in demure period (9)
8 Reggae lover appearing amidst opera's talent (5)
13 Airs arranged by leading groups in *Nabucco* chorus? (10)
15/16a Choir brings some arias excitedly, including extra note (9,7)
17 Marine song has nasty end to verse, unfortunately (3,6)
19 Product of an older Bernstein, say (7)
21 Was nourished by position above head of recording studio (7)
22 Stingy, trimming requirements for ballet dancers? (5)
24 Creeping plants, one in possession of American composer (5)
25 John Williams's genre, for instance – light music, originally (4)

DECEMBER SOLUTION
No. 366

DECEMBER WINNER
Evelyn Tweedie, Stevenage

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Nicky Spence

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Distributed in the US by Circulation Specialists, Inc., 2 Corporate Drive, Suite 945, Shelton CT 06484-6238. Periodicals postage paid at Shelton, CT and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BBC MUSIC, PO Box 37495, Boone, IA 50037-0495.

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abc Jan-Dec 2020 – 25,734

Kate Mosse

Author

Kate Mosse's career began behind the scenes in publishing as editorial director of Hutchinson. She has gone on to pen many historic and ghost fiction novels, as well as personal non-fiction books including *An Extra Pair of Hands*, which sheds light on her experience as a carer for her parents and mother-in-law. In 1996, Mosse co-founded the annual Women's Prize for Fiction, launched in response to an all-male Booker Prize shortlist. Her latest novel, *The City of Tears*, is out now in paperback.

When I was growing up in the 1960s and '70s, my parents had an old-fashioned copper turntable with two very old records that I played over and over again. They were my first experiences of hearing a big orchestral sound. One was Karajan's 1963 recording of BEETHOVEN's Fifth Symphony with the Berlin Philharmonic, which is often overlooked because of its popularity, but the way it builds drama is so brilliant.

I did a lot of ballet when I was a child and remember watching the pianist, thinking I'd rather be doing what they were doing. I later began piano lessons and used to listen to Julius Katchen's recording of RACHMANINOV's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the New Symphony Orchestra of London. I remember trying to play the solo part along with a backing track I had on vinyl. If you lost your way, you'd have to lift the record player's arm up and start again. It was very laborious – and was a piece well beyond my capabilities.

At that point, I thought I was going to pursue music as a profession. Fortunately, I realised in the nick of time that I was a good-enough player... but that was it. I chose to study English at university instead and music then became a real pleasure, rather than work. I fell in love with Russian music and went to the Soviet Union in 1987, where I happened upon a three-hour accordion concert, with 30 accordionists playing Russian music. Everyone took in their own flavoured vodka and kept their coats on because it was so cold. There was something extraordinary about hearing music by the great composers played in their homeland.

When I used to be a publisher, I tried to collaborate on a book with the conductor ODALINE DE LA MARTINEZ, while she was preparing for the 1984 BBC Proms. I'd never seen a woman on the podium when I was growing up. She was the first woman to conduct a Prom, which was so exciting. She wanted to write about the women's orchestras of the Italian convents, which sadly never ended up happening. My aim is to stand shoulder to shoulder with other women and support and promote their work. Trying to put women back into the story of classical music is so important.

The only time listening to music has been part of my work was when I was working on my novel *Sepulchre*, in which DEBUSSY appears as a character. I've always loved the range of his compositions – the shimmering of light and the feeling of a languid afternoon. Of all his works, though, my favourite is the piano Prelude 'La cathédrale engloutie', because it's based on an old Breton folktale. I love ghost stories and the idea of a cathedral coming out of the sea and dipping back below the waves. Debussy always has a narrative to his music.

I write in silence. We don't have a lot of music in the house, because my mother-in-law Granny Rosie lives with us and wears a hearing aid, so music is difficult if it's not the focal point. She likes old musicals and songs of the 1930s and '40s, so we'll listen to music like that together. Mostly, though, I listen to music when I'm driving and I tend to listen back to re-runs of Radio 3's programme *Night Tracks*. You never know what you're going to get. You're introduced to music you'd have never found elsewhere, so end up listening to music from all kinds of musical traditions and cultures. Thanks to *Night Tracks*, I discovered ANNE DUDLEY's album *Songs from the Victorious City* with Jaz Coleman. It's kind of world music, telling an epic story. You can almost imagine the sun rising and setting. Right from the shimmering sound at the beginning, it's like reading a novel.

Interview by Freya Parr

RUTH CRAFER

The choices

Beethoven Symphony No. 5
Berlin Philharmonic/Herbert von Karajan
Deutsche Grammophon 477 7578

Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No. 2
Julius Katchen; New Symphony Orchestra of London/Anatole Fistoulari *P4Y SCDL 16093*

Smyth The Wreckers
Huddersfield Choral Society, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra/Odaline de la Martinez *Retrospect Opera RO 004*

Debussy La cathédrale engloutie
Nelson Freire *Decca 478 1111*

Songs from the Victorious City
Anne Dudley (keyboards)
China Records 847 098-2

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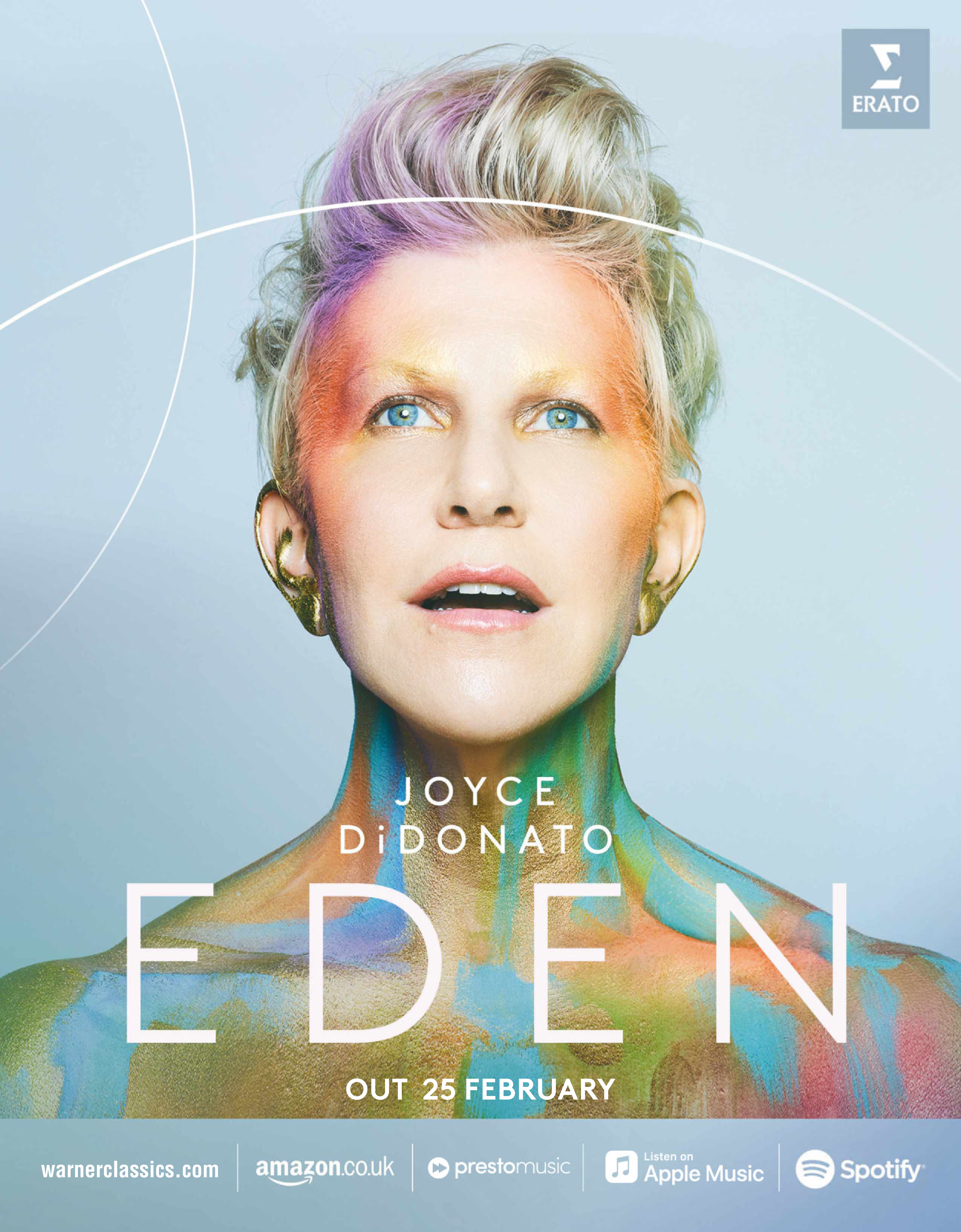
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